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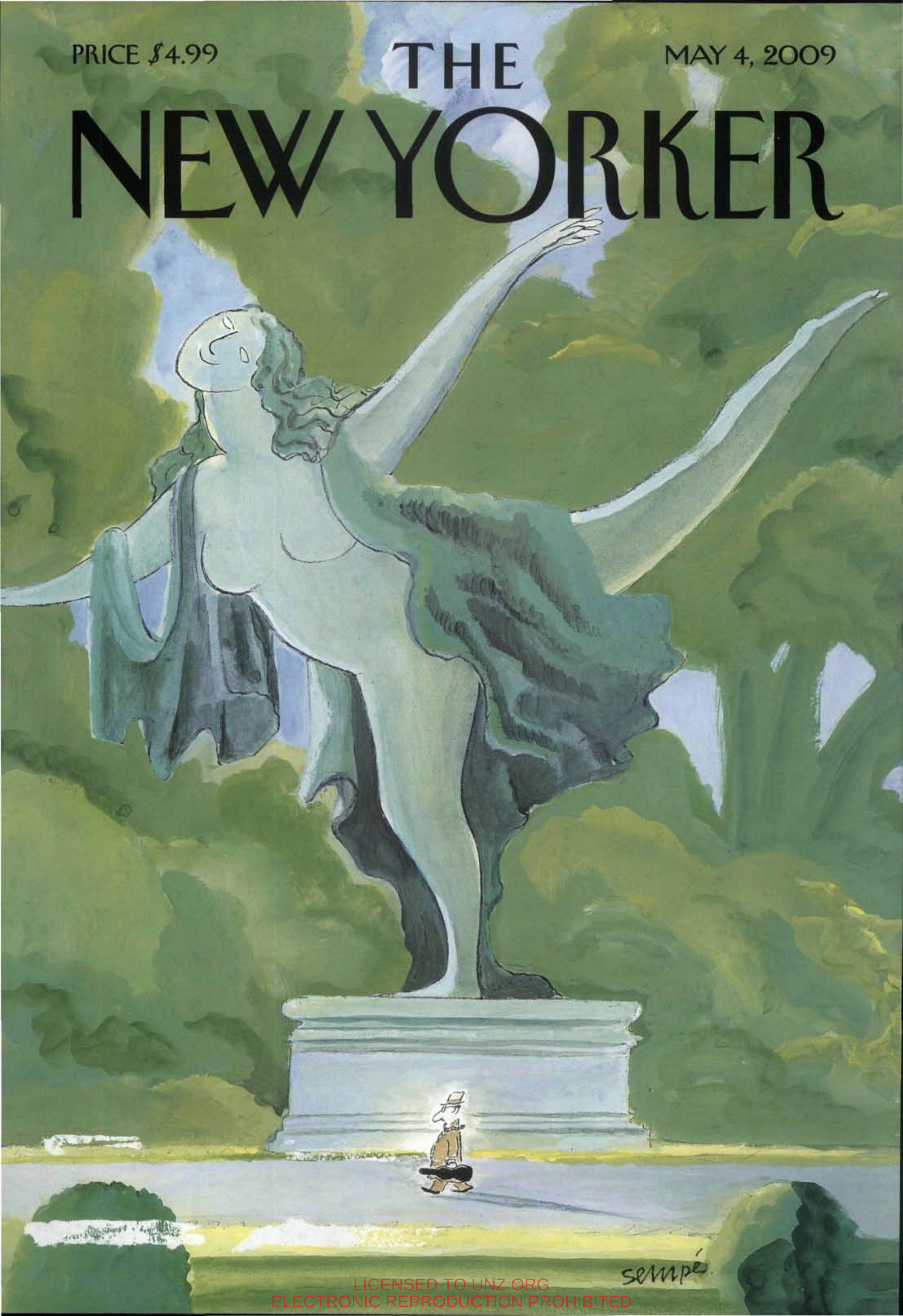
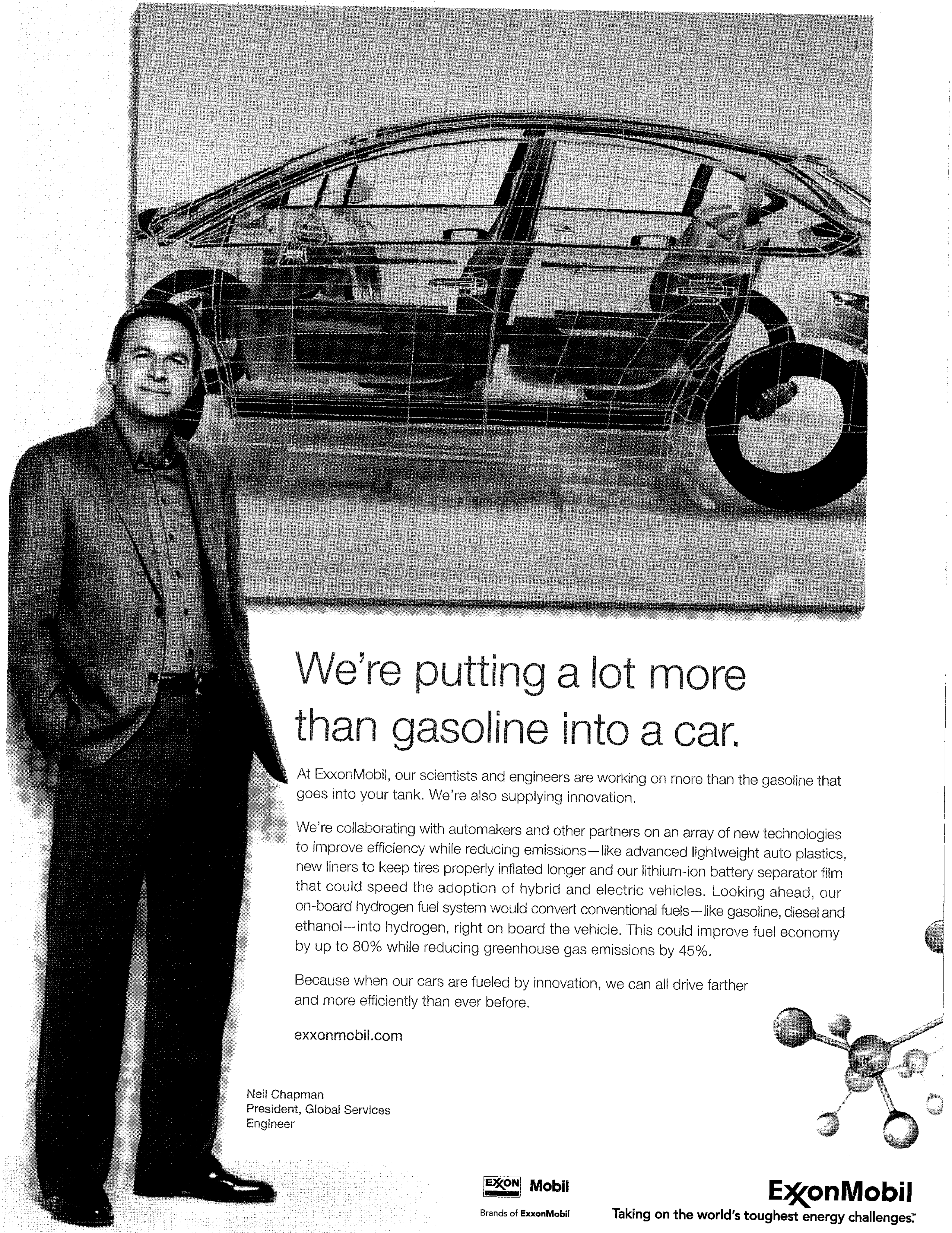
THE NEW YORKER

MAY 4, 2009





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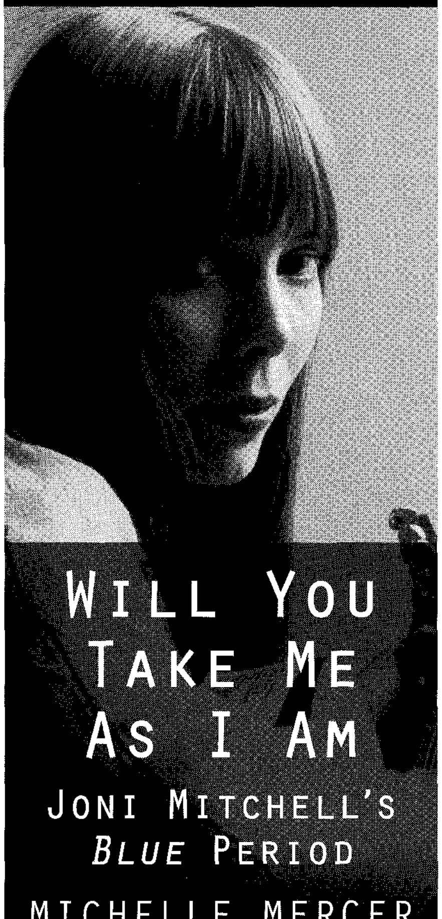

WILL YOU TAKE ME AS I AM

JONI MITCHELL'S *BLUE* PERIOD

MICHELLE MERCER

In the first book about Joni Mitchell written with her cooperation and including detailed interviews, Michelle Mercer looks through the lens of the pivotal album *Blue* to explore the development of an extraordinary artist against the vibrant musical landscape of the 1970s.

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Peter J. Boyer ("Horse Sense," p. 22) joined the magazine as a staff writer in 1992.

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Ryan Lizza ("Money Talks," p. 50) is the magazine's Washington correspondent.

W. S. Merwin (Poem, p. 57) was awarded this year's Pulitzer Prize for poetry for "The Shadow of Sirius," which was published in September, 2008.

Gail Hareven (Fiction, p. 60) is the author of thirteen books, and the winner of the Sapir Prize for Literature. She teaches writing in Jerusalem and is a member of the Academy of the Hebrew Language. "The Confessions of Noa Weber" is her first book to be translated into English.

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Peter Conrad (Books, p. 69) teaches English at Christ Church, Oxford. His new book, "Islands," has just been published.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Ask the Author: *Hendrik Hertzberg* takes readers' questions about politics. / Blogs: *Steve Coll* unpacks the stimulus bill, *Ryan Lizza* offers extras on Peter Orszag, the Book Bench's weekly book-cover quiz, plus the Cartoon Lounge, Goings On, the Front Row, and posts by *James Surowiecki*, *George Packer*, and *Sasha Frere-Jones*. Audio: *Philip Gourevitch* on returning to Rwanda. / *Dorothy Wickenden* hosts the Political Scene, a weekly roundtable. / Audio slide show: *Peter Schjeldahl* on the Pictures generation. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a complete archive of issues, back to 1925.

THE MAIL

LOVE, ITALIAN STYLE

Ian Frazier, in his hilarious sendup of targeted language-learning programs, imagines a "hardworking farm boy," Stan, being stopped by the Italian police for stalking the Italian supermodel of his dreams (Shouts & Murmurs, April 13th). He follows a fine tradition. In 1855, the Victorian poet Robert Browning, in his great poem "Fra Lippo Lippi," similarly imagines the Renaissance painter-monk; while a house guest of Cosimo di Medici, he is stopped by the Italian police (this time in Florence, not Milan) for—what else?—stalking the city's "sportive ladies." After a long monologue describing how the Carmelites rescued him from poverty as an orphan but were horrified by the realism of his paintings ("Your business is not to catch men with show, / With homage to the perishable clay, / But lift them over it, ignore it all, / Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh. / Your business is to paint the souls of men—"), he ends by telling the police that he can get home by himself in the dawn's early light: "Your hand, sir, and good-bye: no lights, no lights! / The street's hushed, and I know my own way back, / Don't fear me! There's the grey beginning. Zooks!"

John Irving
Woodland Hills, Calif.

GOING BROKE

Jill Lepore's richly detailed article on the history of America's bankruptcy laws suggests there's profit in examining our collective conscience about our borrowing habits ("I.O.U.," April 13th). I agree. But many experts also think that our relatively forgiving bankruptcy laws in the twentieth century contributed to a resilient economy and created an atmosphere in which business risk-taking was encouraged (unlike in Japan and other countries, where economic failure has been handled in a distinctly punitive fashion). Unfortunately, credit-card lobbyists succeeded in persuading Congress to rewrite the law, in 2005, making bankruptcy difficult and expensive. Against the backdrop of the astonishingly reckless banking fiasco that has since unravelled, the cynically named Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act of 2005 (which at its core assumes that the poor abuse the legal system) is particularly shameful.

Jim Vidmar
Annapolis, Md.

INSPIRATION OR MOTIVATION

Anthony Lane's sensitive and nuanced review of Samuel Beckett's early correspondence brings together, in its closing section, two tricky concepts that loom large in the phenomenology of the writer's experience: one is a sense of need—"This matters; this has purpose"; the other is a sense of power or ability—"I can do this, I am able, I can carry out this task to its appropriate end" (A Critic at Large, March 30th). Rainer Maria Rilke once suggested that "a work of art is good if it has arisen out of necessity," implying that a ("good") literary creation has its genesis in a sense of necessity. But what of those writers who feel the need but technically cannot rise to the occasion? And what of those writers who, in order to discover an authentic sense of need or purpose, must first slog through the otherwise mundane task of writing itself—"go through the motions," so to speak? It seems that the achievement of productive periods eventually involves a substantive psychological merging of these two analytically separate states.

Joachim B. Lyon
Stanford, Calif.

CORRECTION: The cartoon on page 43 of the April 27th issue was incorrectly credited; the artist was Karen Sneider.

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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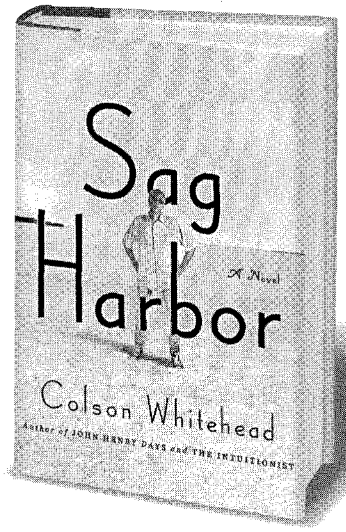
AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR OF *JOHN HENRY DAYS* AND *THE INTUITIONIST*



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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
OLD-TIMER

Samson Raphaelson's first Broadway play was "The Jazz Singer," in 1925, which was later adapted into movies starring Al Jolson and Neil Diamond; as a screenwriter, he collaborated with Ernst Lubitsch on no fewer than eleven films. Manhattan Theatre Club revives Raphaelson's 1934 comedy, "Accent on Youth," starring David Hyde Pierce as a successful playwright and Mary Catherine Garrison as the secretary who inspires him; Daniel Sullivan directs. (See page 6.)

NIGHT LIFE
GARDEN PARTY

The folk legend and environmental activist Pete Seeger celebrates his ninetieth birthday with a gathering at Madison Square Garden, featuring Bruce Springsteen, Dave Matthews, John Mellencamp, Ani DiFranco, Dar Williams, Arlo Guthrie, Billy Bragg, and a few dozen more of his friends. (See page 8.)

ART
OUTSIDE CHANCE

Roxy Paine, whose steel trees graced Central Park in 2002 and Madison Square Park in 2007, brings his interest in the branching forms of nature to the roof of the Met. "Maelstrom," a hundred-and-thirty-foot-long sculpture inspired, in part, by vascular networks, was created by welding together seven tons of stainless-steel pipes. (See page 8.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
THE RING CLOSES

At the Metropolitan Opera, the last run of Otto Schenk's traditionalist staging of "Der Ring des Nibelungen" is in full swing. This week brings performances of "Siegfried," "Götterdämmerung," and "Das Rheingold," all conducted by James Levine. (See page 11.)

MOVIES
BY THE SEA

French Institute Alliance Française offers a month of films about Haiti, beginning with "The Agronomist," a documentary about the country's first independent radio station, directed by Jonathan Demme, who helped program the series and will be on hand to discuss his film. (See page 14.)

Trisha Brown Dance Company, at BAM this week. Photograph by Yola Monakhov.

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—President Barack Obama, February 24, 2009

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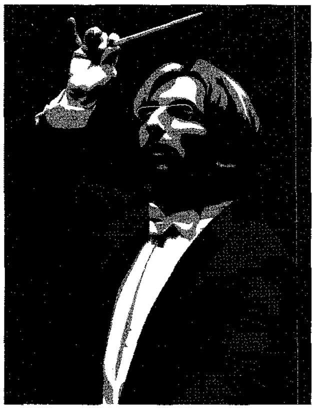
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
PRACTICE, PRACTICE

The YouTube Symphony, a global orchestra assembled from online audition videos, may sound like yet another groan-inducing attempt to make classical music hip. But there's some method in the marketing madness: YouTube has become a serious resource for professional musicians, who use it to investigate up-and-coming talent. The orchestra recently made its début at Carnegie Hall, under a hard media glare. Michael Tilson Thomas conducted the concert, making it more substantial and surprising than it might have been. Standard fare by Brahms and Tchaikovsky was mixed with far-out West Coast sounds. Tan Dun contributed a noisy, empty overture called "Internet Symphony No. 1" (the title felt like a threat). Measha Brueggergosman gave a ferocious performance of John Cage's "Aria." For a group that came together only two days before its début, the orchestra sounded reasonably polished, although established ensembles have nothing to fear from the competition. You can see the entire thing on you-know-where.



—Alex Ross

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

ACCENT ON YOUTH
Manhattan Theatre Club presents Samson Raphaelson's 1934 comedy, in which a successful playwright struggling with his latest work becomes inspired by his secretary and produces a Broadway hit. David Hyde Pierce and Charles Kimbrough star; Daniel Sullivan directs. Opens April 29. (Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

BLOODY BLOODY ANDREW JACKSON: THE CONCERT VERSION
As part of the Public LAB series, Alex Timbers, in association with Les Freres Corbusier, wrote and directs this musical, a satirical look at the seventh President. Michael Friedman wrote the music and lyrics. Previews begin May 5. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

CHRISTMAS IS MILES AWAY
At the Connelly, Babel Theatre Project presents this drama by Chloe Moss, which follows three English friends as they grow apart. Geordie Broadwater directs. Previews begin May 1. Opens May 4. (220 E. 4th St. 212-352-3101.)

EVERYDAY RAPTURE
Dick Scanlan and Sherie Rene Scott, who also stars, wrote this coming-of-age story, about a Mennonite girl who goes to Manhattan. Michael Mayer directs. In previews. Opens May 3. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

FINDING THE ROOSTER
Terence Patrick Hughes wrote and directs this play, set in 1965, about the effect of the Vietnam War on a suburban New England family. Previews begin May 1. (13th Street Repertory, 50 W. 13th St. 212-675-6677.)

GALILEO / THE SCIENCE PLAYS
Milk Can Theatre Company performs two plays in repertory: "Galileo," Bertolt Brecht's meditation on the mathematician's philosophies (directed by Julie Fei-Fan Balzer), and "The Science Plays," a compendium of short works spanning topics from Archimedes to the future. Opens April 30. (Urban Stages, 259 W. 30th St. 212-868-4444.)

GROUNDSWELL
The New Group presents a thriller by Ian Bruce, in which two South African lodge employees hatch a get-rich-quick scheme involving nearby diamond mines. Larry Bryggman, David Lansbury, and Souleymane Sy Savane star; Scott Elliott directs. Previews begin May 4. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

A MORE PERFECT UNION
Epic Theatre Ensemble presents the première of a new comedy by Vern Thiessen, about two Supreme Court Justices who must overcome their differences. Previews begin May 5. (East 13th Street Theatre, 136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

9 TO 5: THE MUSICAL
Allison Janney, Stephanie J. Block, Megan Hilty, and Marc Kudisch star in the musical version of the 1980 movie, with original music and lyrics by Dolly Parton and a book by Patricia Resnick. Joe Mantello directs. In previews. Opens April 30. (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

OFFICES
The world première of three new one-act comedies about the workplace by Ethan Coen, directed by Neil Pepe. The cast includes F. Murray Abraham and Aya Cash. In previews. (Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 212-279-4200.)

SOPHISTRY
South Ark Stage revives this 1993 comedy by Jonathan Marc Sherman, about a group of New England college students who are affected by the sexual-harassment accusations made against their philosophy professor. In previews. Opens May 5. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE TEMPERAMENTALS
Jon Marans wrote this play, based on a true story about the designer Rudi Gernreich and the Communist Harry Hay, who founded the first gay-rights organization. Jonathan Silverstein directs. Previews begin April 30. Opens May 4. (Barrow Group Studio, 312 W. 36th St. 212-868-4444.)

WAITING FOR GODOT
Roundabout Theatre Company presents Samuel Beckett's masterpiece, starring Bill Irwin (as Vladimir) and Nathan Lane (as Estragon). Also with John Goodman (Pozzo) and John Glover (Lucky). Anthony Page directs. In previews. Opens April 30. (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

NOW PLAYING

DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS
Eugene O'Neill's 1924 drama, about a woman who has an affair with her stepson, transfers from the Goodman Theatre. Brian Dennehy, Carla Gugino, and Pablo Schreiber star; Robert Falls directs. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE GINGERBREAD HOUSE
"I think we should sell the kids," Brian (Jason Butler Harner) tells his wife, Stacey (Sarah Paulson), one night while they're watching TV. It turns out that he's serious, and that his Mephistophelean associate Marco (Bobby Cannavale) can make it happen. This conceit sets off Mark Schultz's comedy, a stale parable of yuppie greed, produced by the StageFARM. After shipping their two children to Albania, Brian and Stacey begin to enjoy the freedom and upward mobility they crave—unsurprisingly, at a price. Treating his characters with a facile misanthropy, Schultz never delivers on their comic potential. The thinness of the satire trips up an overqualified cast, including the droll delight Jackie Hoffman, in a throwaway role. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

JOE TURNER'S COME AND GONE
Of the ten plays in August Wilson's Century Cycle, this one (under the deft direction of Bartlett Sher) was his favorite and his masterpiece. In 1911, the haunted, taciturn Herald Loomis (Chad L. Coleman) wanders into a Pittsburgh boarding house, having endured twin traumas: he was dragooned into slavery for seven years by a white plantation owner, Joe Turner, and he was abandoned by his wife, for whom he has been searching, with his now eleven-year-old daughter, Zonia (Amari Rose Leigh), for four years. At a time just after Plessy v. Ferguson—according to which African-Americans were considered "separate but equal"—the separation, for the boarding-house residents, is spectacular: separation from history, from family, from education, from capital, from self. At the end of the play, the air is suddenly flecked with gold, a halo of sorts, meant to indicate Loomis's resurrection, but it also represents the shine of Wilson's œuvre, "a wail and a whelp of joy" that was his hard-won and gorgeous song. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/27/09.) (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

MARY STUART
The excellent support of John Benjamin Hickey, Chandler Williams, and Nicholas Woodeson as backbiting Tudor courtiers in Friedrich Schiller's 1800 play (in an outstanding new version by Peter Oswald) gives a special wallop to the evening's main event: a showdown between the Catholic Mary, Queen of Scots (the strapping Janet McTeer), imprisoned for plotting against the Protestant throne, and Queen Elizabeth I (the fine-boned Harriet Walter), who has her cousin's butt in a sling but may want her head as well. McTeer and Walter are alert and articulate; they parse every nuance of every word. As McTeer's Mary struggles to contain her fury, Walter's Queen hides a vicious heart behind her starchiness. The director, Phyllida Lloyd, imposes a dashing urgency on the events: from the first beat, the play explodes before us. The political pragmatism may be predictable; the theatrical pyrotechnics with which it's displayed are exceptional. (4/27/09) (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE NORMAN CONQUESTS
In the first few moments of Alan Ayckbourn's brilliantly written trilogy of madcap comedies—just over from a sold-out run at Kevin Spacey's Old Vic, in London—Annie, a dishevelled woman careening, all alone, toward middle age, admits to her prudish

DANIEL HERTZBERG

sister-in-law, Sarah, that she's considering embarking on a "dirty weekend" with her own sister's husband, a relentless Lothario named Norman, who has the ridiculous and irresistible personality of a circus clown. This unsolicited admission leads the entire family of eccentrics to spend a weekend of lunacy together at the family manse. All three full-length plays—each of which is set in a different room of the house on that weekend—contain clever revelations about why the family is becoming more and more undone as the days go by. Wilder and farther outside the box than your average drawing-room comedy, this sophisticated, hilarious, and ultimately profound trilogy, masterfully directed by Matthew Warchus, takes shtick about as far as it can go in nearly seven hours—which is to say, unusually far. A lot is owed to the six actors, who bring their characters' vulnerabilities to life in fresh and vivid ways. (Circle in the Square, 235 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE PHILANTHROPIST
Matthew Broderick, Jonathan Cake, Anna Madeley, and Steven Weber star in the Roundabout Theatre Company production of Christopher Hampton's comedy. David Grindley directs. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

Also Playing

AVENUE Q: Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BLITHE SPIRIT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **EXIT THE KING:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **GOD OF CARNAGE:** Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE-ROCK MUSICAL:** Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **JOHN LITHGOW: STORIES BY HEART:** Mitzi E. Newhouse, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **NEXT TO NORMAL:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **OUR TOWN:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444. **REASONS TO BE PRETTY:** Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **ROCK OF AGES:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. **33 VARIATIONS:** O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THE TOXIC AVENGER:** New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **WEST SIDE STORY:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

THE BELL HOUSE
149 7th St., between Second and Third Aves., Brooklyn (718-643-6510)—April 29: A benefit for Rory O'Sullivan, an aspiring young filmmaker who is recovering from having a brain tumor removed, with the **Fugs, Acrylics, Golden Triangle, White Williams, Mount Olympus**, and other spirited acts. (For more information, visit www.rock4rorz.com.) May 3: It's not surprising to catch **Marnie Stern** outside a venue after a show fawning over her tiny dog, Fig, who travels with her. A cross between a Yorkshire terrier and a Maltese (a Morkie), Fig is lucky enough to tour with one of the most talented guitar-shredders to come out of New York in recent memory. Stern's lightning-fast finger-tapping style and hysteric yelps have been paired on recent recordings with the spasmodic drumming of Zach Hill, who usually showcases his talents in his math-rock project, Hella. Although Hill is not on this tour, Stern still promises to deliver a frenetic blast of restlessness.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—April 30: **Bat for Lashes.** This English outfit weaves a quasi-mythical blend of pop music from strands of eighties electronica and traditional folk music. "Two Suns," the band's enigmatic sophomore release, has a feeling of fantasy, as though the musicians are channelling pagan deities through highly textured production. May 4: The **Dears,** a versatile Canadian indie-rock collective anchored by the accomplished vocalist Murray Lightburn, craft sweeping epics that push far beyond the traditional three-minute pop-song parameter. They've been compared to everyone from the Smiths to Radiohead, but big-time Stateside success has proved elusive.

GRAMERCY THEATRE
127 E. 23rd St. (877-598-8694)—May 5: **Gavin Rossdale** first found fame, in the nineties, playing tortured ersatz grunge rock as the front man of Bush, but the photogenic guitar-basher has gone on to greater things: he's the pop starlet Gwen Stefani's husband. Marriage must agree with him, as his solo work largely forsakes the angst and clamor of his early days.

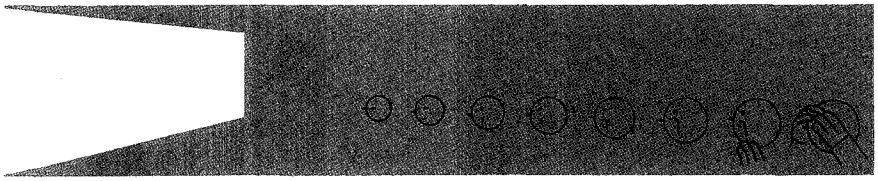
GRAND BALLROOM
Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. (800-745-3000)—May 1: The neo-soul vocalist **India.Arie**, whose latest album, "Testimony: Vol. 2, Love & Politics," is full of songs about healing and peace.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—April 29: So far, the most compelling reason to tune in to Jimmy Fallon's "Late Night" is to catch the show's house band, the legendary hip-hop and rap unit from Philadelphia, the **Roots.** Even better is to see them here, where they perform late-night jams with special guests on a regular basis. May 5: At twenty-three years old, the London-based rapper Louise Amanda Harman has made quite a name for herself as **Lady Sovereign.** After being dropped by Island and Def Jam Records for her controversial behavior and a lack of output, she returns to support a new record, "Jigsaw," released on her own label, Midget Records. (Sov, as she calls herself, is just over five feet tall.) Her impudent brand of British grime (a London-based hip-hop/garage/punk movement of the early aughts, of which Harman was the only major white female artist) has survived its initial success and found an international audience. "Jigsaw" contemplates the destructive consequences of fame, which have included, for Lady Sovereign, physical altercations, an overdose on pills, and suicidal thoughts.

IZOD CENTER
The Meadowlands, New Jersey (800-745-3000)—April 28-29: The **Dead.** Since the passing of their iconic front man and spiritual leader, Jerry Garcia, in 1995, the surviving members of the Grateful Dead have been faced with a paradox: despite Garcia's absence, interest in the band has only grown. The long-established network of fans, tape collectors, aging Deadheads, and hippie wannabes has not been fully sated by the various side projects spearheaded by the guitarist Bob Weir and the bassist Phil Lesh, so Weir, Lesh, and the drummers Mickey Hart and Bill Kreutzmann have reassembled under a slightly truncated moniker to resume their long, strange trip.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—May 5: The acoustic-blues innovator Alvin Youngblood Hart, the guitarist Luther Dickinson (of the North Mississippi All-Stars and the Black Crowes), and the guitarist and singer Jimbo Mathus (Squirrel Nut Zippers) have formed the **South Memphis String Band,** to perform songs influenced by the Memphis Jug Band and Mississippi Delta sounds of the late twenties. The trio's forthcoming album, "New Moon Jellyroll Freedom Rockers," was produced by Luther's father, the legendary Jim Dickinson.

LAURENT CILLUFFO



DVD NOTES
THE NICK OF TIME

David Fincher's "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" (now available in a two-disk set from Criterion and in a single-disk release from Paramount) is based on a short story by F. Scott Fitzgerald, a gentle fantasy about a man who is born old and ages in reverse. The film, with a script by Eric Roth, reworks Fitzgerald's light-comedy conceit into a sumptuous and stirring work of art. It also turns it into a romantic vehicle for Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett, yet, even as the movie fulfills the sentimental expectations of a grand and tragic love story, it reaches speculative heights that are rare in Hollywood.

Using the framework of a long-hidden diary and a mysterious tale of concealed paternity, Fincher and Roth dramatize the process of filmmaking itself by turning the text of Benjamin's recollections into a series of long flashbacks that tell his life story, beginning with his birth, on November 11, 1918. That night, at the end of the First World War, a monstrously decrepit and seemingly moribund newborn is abandoned by his prosperous family and left to be adopted by a poor black woman who, appropriately, runs an old-age home. The young/old man's birth date thus launches the story with a suggestion of auspicious historical focus; Fincher's subject is nothing less than time itself, and the role of the cinema as its repository. If time is familiarly imagined as a river (and rivers play a major part in the story), Benjamin makes its current visible by plying against the flow.

Amazing technical prowess is brought to bear on Benjamin's transformations, as when Pitt's face and head, heavily made up to appear aged, are seamlessly grafted, through digital means, onto the body of a small child. Even more important is Fincher's use of his sophisticated methods in the simulation of ordinariness. The effect is an exquisite hyperrealism that floats along with the fragile bliss of dreams—for instance, whatever is strange about being twelve years old is heightened by hearing a twelve-year-old's expressions in a gravelly voice emanating from the wizened body of an elderly man.

What Benjamin calls the "unusual circumstances" of his birth have endowed him with a preternatural gravity, which arises, first, from his sense of being out of synch with his times, and then, as he grows up, from an intensified sense of his own transience. He absorbs and savors his experiences with a keen, quiet serenity perched on the edge of tears; his second childhood—the burdened infancy of his final days—rises to a stunningly poignant conclusion. Benjamin's life is defined by the weighty historical resonance of crucial dates—his daughter is born in 1968, and he dies in the spring of 2003, at the start of the Iraq war—and the framing story, set in a New Orleans hospital during Hurricane Katrina, becomes a grave reminder that what seems solid is tragically impermanent.

—*Richard Brody*

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN
Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. (800-745-3000)—May 3: **Pete Seeger's** ninetieth birthday won't be your typical garden party with friends—his garden is Madison Square, and his friends are **Bruce Springsteen, Arlo Guthrie, Eddie Vedder, Joan Baez, Dave Matthews, Emmylou Harris, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Ben Harper, Ani DiFranco, John Mellencamp, Steve Earle, Michael Franti,** and **David Amram,** among many others. Here, ticket holders get a special party favor: a one-year membership to Clearwater, the Seeger-sanctioned Hudson River restoration organization. Most tickets are ninety dollars, in honor of the birthday; others range from $19.19, the year Seeger was born, to two hundred and fifty dollars, the number of years one hopes he lives.

THE MARKET HOTEL
1142 Myrtle Ave., at Broadway, Brooklyn (No phone)—May 3: For the past decade, **Mirah** (née Mirah Yom Tov Zeitlyn) has been a shining star of the Pacific Northwest's lo-fi indie scene. Crafting earnest portraits of small joys and idiosyncrasies, she's long maintained a commitment to playful experimentation. Brooklyn's **Air Waves,** who have been garnering attention lately for their heartfelt folk-rock, open the show.

S.O.B.'S
204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (212-243-4940)—May 5: The spunky Mexican dance-pop singer **Amandititita** celebrates Cinco de Mayo, the holiday that honors her country's 1862 defeat of the French Army in the Battle of Puebla.

THE STONE
Avenue C at 2nd St. (No phone)—May 1: The incomparable guitarist **Loren (Mazzacane) Connors** performs his slow and eerie take on the blues. In the past three decades, Connors, who has been championed by everyone from Thurston Moore to Dr. William Ferris (the former head of the National Endowment for the Humanities), has built an unlikely bridge between the dark atmospherics of bluesmen like Blind Willie McTell and the hypnotic drones of the minimalist composer LaMonte Young. (For more information, visit www.thestonenyc.com.)

TERMINAL 5
610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—May 2: A super-ambitious star in the vein of early Madonna, **Lady Gaga** pairs the pop and savvy of the Material Girl with the contemporary sheen of Britney Spears and the old-school pomp and circumstance of glam rock. (The Ziggy Stardust-esque lightning bolt she sports on her face is no accident, and her stage name references a 1984 Queen anthem.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

ALGONQUIN HOTEL
59 W. 44th St. (212-840-6800)—Through May 23: **Maude Maggart,** the sultry and sweet-voiced sister of the pop star Fiona Apple, performs songs by Sondheim, Rodgers and Hammerstein, and Gershwin, among others, backed by **John Boswell,** on piano, and **Yair Evnine,** on cello and guitar.

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—April 29-May 2: **Karrin Allyson** is a pleasing singer with a taste for concept albums. Her latest release, "Imagina: Songs of Brasil," finds her embracing a repertoire she has successfully touched on in the past. May 4: **Christine Ebersole,** whose run on Broadway in "Grey Gardens" cemented her status as a titan of musical theatre, presents a new show, "Garage Band Fantasy," which includes songs by the Eagles, Joni Mitchell, Michael MacDonald, Sting, and other pop stars.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—April 28-May 3: The guitarist and singer **John Pizzarelli** brings enthusiasm and technical aplomb to standards and contemporary material.

CAFÉ CARLYLE
Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—Through May 30: **Judy Collins** has made a seamless transition from folk deity to cabaret icon. Her high artistry and disarming candor translate well to an intimate room.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—April 28-May 3: An all-star ensemble including the trumpeter **Claudio Roditi,** the guitarist **Toninho Horta,** and the bassist **Eddie Gomez** celebrates the glorious music of the Brazilian composer Antonio Carlos Jobim.

A Kentucky Derby party in Brooklyn (see Above and Beyond).

DANIELA SCHÜTT POZZO

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Herbie Hancock's jazz colleagues are ever ready to pay homage to the legendary pianist and composer. Here, a quintet featuring the trumpeters **Wallace Roney** (on April 30 and May 3), **Jeremy Pelt** (on May 1), and **Randy Brecker** (on May 2) draws on the Hancock repertoire.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—April 28-May 3: **Chris Potter's Underground.** Stepping out on his own, the in-demand saxophonist Potter convenes his bassless quartet, featuring **Adam Rogers,** on guitar, and **Craig Taborn,** on electric piano. May 4: The **Mingus Big Band.**

SMALLS
183 W. 10th St. (212-252-5091)—April 30: **Ehud Asherie,** a master of swing and stride piano, performs off-the-cuff duets with the guitarist **Chris Flory.** Later that night: The **John McNeil Group.** The adventurous trumpeter McNeil has found a like-minded partner in the young saxophonist **Noah Preminger.** May 5: The pianist **Fred Hersch** unveils a new trio, with **John Hebert,** on bass, and **Jochen Rueckert,** on drums.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—April 28-May 3: The **Barry Harris** trio. Harris, a revered second-generation bebop pianist, is as close to the genuine spirit of the genre as any musician working today. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—"**Cast in Bronze: French Sculpture from Renaissance to Revolution.**" Through May 24. ♦ "**Art of the Korean Renaissance, 1400-1600.**" Through June 21. ♦ "**Walker Evans and the Picture Postcard.**" Through May 25. ♦ "**The Pictures Generation, 1974-1984.**" Through Aug. 2. ♦ "**Roxy Paine on the Roof: Maelstrom.**" Through Oct. 25. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—"**Martin Kippenberger: The Problem Perspective.**" Through May 11. ♦ "**Performance 1: Tehching Hsieh.**" Through May 18. ♦ "**a shimmer of possibility: Photographs by Paul Graham.**" Through May 18. ♦ "**Projects 89: Klara Liden.**" Through June 8. ♦ "**Into the Sunset: Photography's Image of the American West.**" Through June 8. ♦ "**Compass in Hand: Selections from the Judith Rothschild Foundation Contemporary Drawings Collection.**" Through July 27. ♦ "**Tangled Alphabets: León Ferrari and Mira Schendel.**" In the sixties, while theory-besotted North Americans like Joseph Kosuth took up text as a formless conveyor of concepts, two South American modernists—the Argentinean Ferrari (born in 1920) and the Swiss-born Schendel (1919-88), who worked in Brazil—used language for the allure of its form. Words accrue into strands of arabesquerie in Ferrari's "Cuadro Escrito (Written Painting)," from 1964; letters spiral into graphite whirlpools and rain down in red, yellow, and orange in Schendel's drawings from the sixties and seventies. Of the two artists, Schendel is the more consistent, poetic, and self-effacing (a series of woven sculptures is subtitled "Little Nothings"). Ferrari looks more blustering and restless—a conceptualist here (Braille-embossed photography), a formalist there (the stainless-steel-bronze-and-copper "Tower of Babel"). He is also a provocateur: installed in the penultimate room of the show is a reproduction of Michelangelo's "Last Judgment" stained with bird droppings. Through June 15. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—"**Intervals: Julieta Aranda.**" Through July 19. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—"**Jenny Holzer: Protect Protect.**" Through May 31. ♦ "**Elad Lassry: Three Films.**" Through April 30. ♦ "**Sites.**" Through May 3. ♦ "**Sadie Benning: Play Pause.**" Through Aug. 30. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"**Unearthing the Truth: Egypt's Pagan and Coptic Sculpture.**" Through May 10. ♦ "**Hernan Bas: Works from the Rubell Family Collection.**" Through May 24. ♦ "**Sun K. Kwak: Enfolding Two Hundred and Eighty Hours.**" Through July 5. ♦ "**Gustave Caillebotte: Impressionist Paintings from Paris to the Sea.**" Through July 5. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Climate Change: The Threat to Life and a New Energy Future."** Through Aug. 16. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter."** Through May 25. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Masterpieces of European Painting from the Norton Simon Museum."** Through May 10. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Weird Beauty: Fashion Photography Now."** Through May 3. ♦ **"This Is Not a Fashion Photograph."** Tucked behind "Weird Beauty," the fashion-photography extravaganza that's been packing in crowds like the tents at Bryant Park, is this gem of a show organized by Vince Aletti (a critic in these pages). Around seventy pictures, most drawn from the museum's collection and created as either works of art or photojournalism, equate style with substance in unlikely ways. Muckraking meets Bill Cunningham in Jacob Riis's portrait of three young women at the Beech Street Industrial School, circa 1888. The shredded pant leg of a Polish worker, photographed by Robert Capa in 1948, presages the craze for preworn denim. Stokely Carmichael, fashion icon? Gordon Parks's portrait of the activist leaning against a tree in narrow jeans is casual chic incarnate. Even timeworn images become fresh. You may have seen "The Irascibles," Nina Leen's famous 1950 shot of the Abstract Expressionists, hundreds of times, but never has the cigarette-wielding cadre looked so debonair. Through May 3. ♦ **"Edward Steichen: In High Fashion."** Through May 3. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

JAPAN SOCIETY
333 E. 47th St. (212-752-3015)—**"KRAZY! The Delirious World of Anime + Manga + Video Games."** Through June 14. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 11 to 6, Fridays, 11 to 9, and weekends, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Reclaimed: Paintings from the Collection of Jacques Goudstikker."** Through Aug. 2. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"On the Money: Cartoons for *The New Yorker*."** Through May 24. ♦ **"New at the Morgan: Acquisitions Since 2004."** Through Oct. 18. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"184th Annual Exhibition of Contemporary Art."** Through June 10. (Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Brücke: The Birth of Expressionism in Dresden and Berlin, 1905-1913."** Through June 29. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"The Generational: Younger Than Jesus."** Through June 14. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Kalup Linzy: If It Don't Fit."** Linzy, who was born in 1977, deserves a spot in the New Museum's current triennial, "Younger Than Jesus." His hilarious videos—campy mashups of soap operas, the chitlin' circuit, karaoke, early John Waters, drag balls, sketch comedy, and performance art—have all the sizzle of Ryan Trecartin's cyber-hallucinogenic works. Happily, the Studio Museum, an early Linzy supporter, has given the rising star a show of his own. More than twenty videos compiled into three hour-long segments skewer the politics of race, sex, and art in works like the serial "All My Churen" (episode five: "As da Art World Might Turn") and the "K.K. Queens Survey" (sample dialogue: "Metaphorically speaking, how many asses do you kiss a week?"), with the wildly charismatic Linzy in all the lead roles. Through June 28. ♦ **"Collected: Propositions on the Permanent Collection."** Through June 28. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

TACITA DEAN
Three large photographs of dolmen—slabs that mark prehistoric burial sites in northern Europe—are altered with black paint so that the stones appear to hover in space. Nearby, the backgrounds of six nineteenth-century pictures of trees by the German photographer August Kotzsch are painted white, to a similarly unearthly effect. The dour mood turns uplifting in the twenty-eight-minute film "Michael Hamburger," a mesmerizing portrait of the poet, translator, and apple enthusiast, who died in 2007 (the year Dean completed the film). The piece is utterly uneventful and unexpectedly moving. In drawn-out scenes of a windswept orchard and rotting fruit, of the old man harvesting and then discussing near-extinct varieties in his cellar, apples become a metaphor for the minutiae, humility, disappointment, and beauty of life. Through April 29. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.)

KEIZO KITAJIMA
This spare, eccentrically hung show of unframed silk-screened photographs, newsprint book pages, and vintage magazines focusses on a body of work that Kitajima made in a red-light district near the U.S. Air Force base on Okinawa in 1980. The subjects of his raw, snapshot-style photographs are off-duty American soldiers and Japanese bar girls, drag queens, and musicians, nearly all of whom play to the camera like it's their new best friend. Whether preening, reeling, carousing, or making out, these oblivious characters are caught in the complex web of feelings ("affection, hatred, rejection, acceptance," in Kitajima's shorthand) that kept unresolved postwar issues festering on both sides. Through June 6. (Roth, 160A E. 70th St. 212-717-9067.)

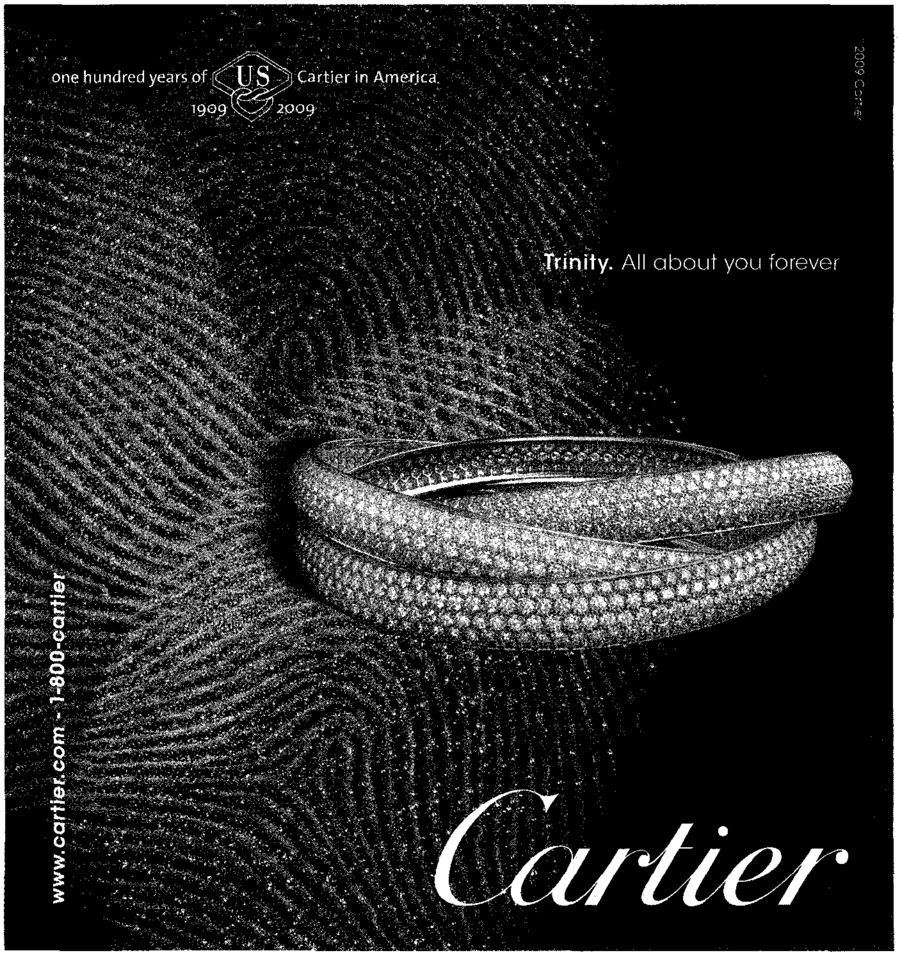
Short List

NOAH DAVIS / JOHN OUTTERBRIDGE: Tilton, 8 E. 76th St. 212-737-2221. Through May 16. **TARA DONOVAN:** Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292. Through May 2. **RAY JOHNSON:** Feigen, 34 E. 69th St. 212-628-0700. Through July 31. **ALBERT OEHLEN:** Skarstedt, 20 E. 79th St. 212-737-2060. Through May 30. **MIMMO ROTELLA:** Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 212-794-0550. Opens April 30.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

PAUL RAMÍREZ JONAS
Two microphones are installed in the gallery (speak into either and your voice fills the room). One is in front of a picture of the moon, formed by lines of printed text that read "I Create as I Speak," a translation of the Aramaic word *abracadabra*. The second hovers above a clay tablet stamped with the Pauper's Oath. Taken together, the pieces can be construed as conveying a message of hope: times may be tough, but shoot for the moon anyway. The nothing-ventured-nothing-gained spirit is underscored by a third piece, made in 1995: an airline itinerary issued to Ferdinand Magellan, for travel from Seville to Santiago de Chile, Manila, Jakarta, Perth, Johannesburg, and Lisbon. Through May 9. (Gray, 526 W. 26th St. 212-399-2636.)

MATVEY LEVENSTEIN
For centuries, painting adhered to a strict hierarchy—eventually flattened by modernism—with religious (and, later, historical) subjects reigning supreme, followed by portraiture and landscape, with still-life on the bottom rung. Levenstein revives the system, only to subvert it once again. Soft-focus paintings of church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interiors, based on photographs he took in Italy, double as still-lifes: they all feature floral arrangements. The show's only landscape isn't really one at all: trees are relegated to the background of a scene dominated by a vase of peonies on a table. Amid all the churches, the most numinous image is a portrait of the artist's sleeping wife, guarded by a vigilant Chihuahua the same Titian hue as her hair. Through May 9. (Goldston, 530 W. 25th St. 212-206-7887.)

MARY MATTINGLY

Mattingly's color photographs are sci-fi fantasies of a future in which nomadic figures in tentlike robes or protective jumpsuits wander through a brave new depopulated world. In several pictures, these faceless figures (survivors? explorers? lone visionaries?) look out over untouched vistas—a snowy mountain range, a receding glacier, a choppy sea. But there's something elegiac about the landscapes, as if they're all that's left of an environment and a civilization that have been reduced to the contents of the towering cardboard boxes that some of the nomads (and a life-size sculpture in the gallery) trundle around on their bicycles. Where do we go from here? Mattingly proposes the Waterpod, an eco-habitat arriving soon at a Manhattan pier. Through May 23. (Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 24th St. 212-989-7600.)

YAMINI NAYAR

This young, New York-based artist makes large color photographs of interiors that look like their architects abandoned them, unfinished, and decided to invite the vandals in. The room in one diptych is papered in a fleur-de-lis pattern, but all sense of domestic refinement stops there; under an armature of shredded draperies, a twisted totem, black as tar, snakes toward the ceiling. In another room, broken black floorboards appear to drop off into a blank void pierced only by a wide-open eye. Nayar constructs these odd, ruined sites on tabletops and photographs them so that all sense of scale is lost and only the uneasy feeling that we've been here before—perhaps in a dream—remains. Through May 9. (Erben, 526 W. 26th St. 212-645-8701.)

Short List

SOPHIE CALLE: Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105. Through May 22. **CHUCK CLOSE:** Pace Wildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000. Opens May 1. **JAMAL CYRUS / ELODIE PONG:** The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Through May 2. **ANDRE ETHIER:** Eller, 615 W. 27th St. 212-206-6411. Through May 16. **HUANG YONG PING:** Gladstone, 530 W. 21st St. 212-206-7606. Opens May 1. **JACQUELINE HUMPHRIES:** Greene Naftali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770. Through May 16. **YAYOI KUSAMA:** Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111. Through June 27. **ROBERT LONGO:** Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 212-206-7100. Through May 30. **ALBERT OEHLEN:** Luhring Augustine, 531 W. 24th St. 212-206-9100. Through May 30. **NAM JUNE PAIK:** James Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500. Through May 30. **PABLO PICASSO:** Gagosian, 522 W. 21st St. 212-741-1717. Through June 6. **RYAN TRECARTIN & LIZZIE FITCH:** Dee, 545 W. 20th St. 212-924-7545. Through May 16.

GALLERIES—BROOKLYN

EDDIE ADAMS

You may not know Adams's name, but you know his work. His photograph of a Vietnamese general, pistol at arm's length, executing a Vietcong prisoner on a Saigon street is lodged deep in the universal image bank. The pictures that preceded and followed it (many previously unseen) are the focal point of this fine exhibition of Adams's Vietnam War reportage, mounted to coincide with the publication of his first book. A front-line photojournalist is a witness to the brutality, injustice, and confusion of war, and it's all here: the dagger at the throat of a captured guerrilla, the wounded civilian left behind by a U.S. helicopter, a panicked evacuation under fire. Through May 4. (Umbrage, 111 Front St. 212-796-2707.)

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET

Balanchine's staging of the great comic ballet "Coppélia," set to Delibes, presents the mischievous heroine Swanilda, who teaches her charming but faithless fiancé, Frantz, a lesson or two and utterly confounds the misguided (and slightly creepy) dollmaker Dr. Coppélius. There are two Swanildas to choose from: the guileless Megan Fairchild and the bold Tiler Peck; casts appear on the company's Web site a week in advance. ♦ April 29 at 7:30, April 30 and May 2 at 8, and May 3 at 3: "Coppélia." ♦ May 1 at 8: "Divertimento No. 15," "After the Rain," and "Firebird." ♦ May 2 at 2: "Concerto Barocco," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," "La Valse," and "Symphony in Three Movements." ♦ May 5 at 7:30: "The Four Temperaments," "La Stravaganza," and "Chaconne." (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Through June 21.)

STEPHEN PETRONIO COMPANY

It's been a quarter century since Petronio made the transition from being a star of Trisha Brown's troupe to forming a company of his own, forging a movement style clearly modelled on that of his mentor but also something distinct, and lucidly louche. He honors the occasion by returning to the stage, fabulously costumed by Cindy Sherman, to open his new piece "I Drink the Air Before Me." The title comes from "The Tempest," and the energy from Nico Muhly's relentless score, rendered live by the composer, an ensemble, and the Young People's Chorus of New York City. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. April 28-29 at 7:30, April 30-May 2 at 8, and May 3 at 2 and 7:30.)

TRISHA BROWN DANCE COMPANY

Call her the grande dame, the high priestess—in the world of postmodern dance, Brown stands apart. "O złożony / O composite," a 1994 commission for the Paris Opera Ballet, is an experiment in a movement language she never studied. Brown imports three stars from that institution for the American première. The language she invented, cool and liquid, is safe in the hands of her own company, masterly in the 1979 signature piece "Glacial Decoy," with its suggestion of a world wider than the borders of the stage and its Robert Rauschenberg image collage. Brown's site-specific beginnings are represented by the wall-scaling "Planes" (1968), and her current stint in opera staging is in evidence in a preview of her take on Rameau's "Hippolyte et Aricie." (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. April 29-May 2 at 7:30.)

SOLEDAD BARRIO AND NOCHE FLAMENCA

The beloved flamenco troupe concludes its run at the New Victory. (209 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. April 30-May 1 at 7, May 2 at 2 and 7, and May 3 at noon and 5.)

ROS WARBY

Warby, a solo artist from Australia, performs "Monumental." The hour-long meditation on femininity, aggression, and the sublimation of art presents Warby as the ultimate ballet paradigm: woman as swan, but without the pointe shoes. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. April 30-May 2 at 7:30.)

NINA WINTHROP AND DANCERS

The choreographer's newest program sandwiches bright new material between two darker repertory works. In a wood-framed room, a reduced version of "Minority," Winthrop's piece about the magnetism of social masses, plays out until a costume change reveals "Glee" in all its fluorescence. "Constraints II" rounds out the program; Jon Gibson, who composed the scores for all three dances, performs live. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. April 30-May 2 at 8:30.)

KATSURA KAN AND DANCERS

The Kyoto-based choreographer, known for applying Butoh techniques to contrastive Western works such as "Giselle," now offers a more complementary pairing, with "Butoh Beckett Notations 09." Beckett's "Quad," a mime for hooded figures that's essentially a choreographic notation, gets crossed with dance scores by the Butoh pioneer Tatsumi Hijikata. Vangeline Theatre, a New York Butoh company, hosts. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101. May 1-2 at 8.)

CHERONNE WONG

The Malaysian-born, Seattle-based choreographer found inspiration for "sub-Rosa" in shortwave radio stations that broadcast nothing but numbers and foreign folk songs. Wong plays with equally indecipherable forms of body language, creating a kind of phys-

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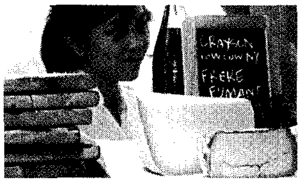
TABLES FOR TWO
VINEGAR HILL HOUSE



JESSIE WENDER

72 Hudson Ave., Brooklyn (718-522-1018)—Vinegar Hill House would merit a place in the American Museum of Natural History if it had a Hall of Cool New Yorkers Under Forty: with a faded flag, needlepoint, and potted cacti, it's a mint example of the pre-industrial, handmade sensibility that has become prevalent in a certain kind of restaurant, circa 2009. The diorama includes salvaged organ pipes, and, in the bathroom, peonies in a jam jar and patina on the faucet. The restaurant is situated in the middle of a semi-deserted cobblestoned block in Vinegar Hill, down which one can picture scamps in suspenders rolling wooden hoops. There is neither a sign nor a vestibule, and a person stumbling in early, before sepia-toned bonhomie sets in, can get the feeling of having missed a secret password. Unless you order a bottle, expect the wine to come in tumblers; if only some cultural anthropologist could explain when, and why, wineglasses became so retro-passé. Recently, certain spirits seem to have been banished to the future. "Vodka doesn't really lend itself to cocktailing," a bartender explained.

The vintage act can get to be a bit much, but Vinegar Hill's prices—nine dollars for an appetizer of mussels, eleven for a ravioli entrée—redeem its pretensions. They also, along with the small kitchen, limit its ambitions. The menu generally features five appetizers and four entrées, some with overlapping ingredients: order the cheese-and-salami plate, and, a few bites later, encounter the cheese and the walnuts, with veggies, reconstituted as elements in a green-bean salad. A vegetable-ricotta tart is wan and soggy; the chicken-liver mousse is good; shrimp, with their heads on, and tossed with fried shallots, are better. As for the entrées, the easy stuff—pastas and pork chops—occasionally flop, while filet of trout, which seems like less of a sure thing, comes out perfectly cooked. The signature dish, the chicken, arrives in a cast-iron skillet, which a waiter sets down on a grubby pot holder. The steam creates an odd, bonglike effect—hits of sherry vinegar—but, once you get past that, the meat is moist and the skin is crisp. The chocolate Guinness cake might explain all the flannel shirts—working your way through the cream-cheese icing is like shovelling a snowdrift. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays for dinner. Entrées $11-$23.)

—Lauren Collins

ical espionage of dance. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. May 1-2 at 8 and May 3 at 3.)

ALONZO KING'S LINES BALLET
King seeks out musicians from a variety of traditions, from avant-garde jazz to the Japanese neo-Romantic orchestrations of Somei Satoh. In "Rasa," King's lithe dancers interpret the complex rhythmic phrases of northern Indian music, in a score composed by the tabla virtuoso Zakir Hussain. Unlike in traditional Indian dance, the patterns play out evenly over the body, which ripples and coils with King's supple movement. The other work on the program is the new "Dust and Light," set to music by Corelli and Poulenc. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. May 5 at 7:30. Through May 10.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
David McVicar's fine new production of **"Il Trovatore"** successfully reclaims Verdi's ardent melodrama for the house. This performance features Hasmik Papian, Dolora Zajick, Marco Berti, and Željko Lučić; Riccardo Frizza conducts. (April 29 at 8 and May 2 at noon.) ♦ The Met bids farewell to its Otto Schenk production of Wagner's "Der Ring des Nibelungen," which has been satisfying traditionalists for more than twenty years with its literal depiction of primordial rivers, misty mountaintops, and gnarled subterranean lairs. **"Siegfried,"** the third installment, finds the opera's eponymous hero coming of age by slaying a dragon and winning a wife (Brünnhilde). Linda Watson, Wendy White, Christian Franz (in the title role), Robert Brubaker, and Albert Dohmen lead the cast; James Levine, of course, is at the helm. (April 30 at 6.) ♦ Cesare Lievi's production of Rossini's **"La Cenerentola"** is as close to pure joy as you will find in a big-time opera house. The cast, a promising mixture of newcomers and relative veterans, includes such singers as Elīna Garanča, Lawrence Brownlee, Simone Alberghini, Alessandro Corbelli, and John Relyea; Maurizio Benini. (May 1 at 8.) ♦ **"Götterdämmerung,"** the final chapter of the "Ring" cycle, is a musical and literary tapestry—spun largely from the strands of human evil—of an almost Shakespearean density. The most formidable of operas, its cast features Katarina Dalayman, Margaret Jane Wray, Yvonne Naef, Christian Franz, Iain Paterson, Tom Fox, and John Tomlinson; Levine. (May 2 at 6.) ♦ **"Das Rheingold"** provides a primer for the cycle, introducing the crooked bargain that undoes the gods. James Morris, as Wotan, heads a distinguished ensemble cast that features Wendy Bryn Harmer, Yvonne Naef, Richard Paul Fink, and, in the roles of Fasolt and Fafner, the thrilling René Pape and the redoubtable John Tomlinson; James Levine conducts with a patient, familiar touch, but he knows when to let the orchestra roar. (May 4 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA VOX FESTIVAL
Now in its tenth year, this festival, which showcases scenes from eight new operas across the stylistic spectrum, has become a major event on New York's opera calendar. Such singers as Lauren Flanigan, Melissa Fogarty, and Eugene Brancoveanu are featured in performances conducted by Marc Lowenstein and David Wroe, among others. May 1 at 7: Excerpts from works by Ted Hearne, Chandler Carter, Yoav Gal, Gordon Beeferman, and the acclaimed Broadway composer Stephen Schwartz ("Séance on a Wet Afternoon," his first opera, starring Flanigan). ♦ May 2 at 2: Scenes from works by Christopher Cerrone, Jonathan Dawe, Michaela Eremiášová and Jairo Duarte-López ("Car Crash Opera," an eight-minute animated feature), Anne LeBaron, and David Bruce. (Skirball Center, New York University, 566 LaGuardia Place. For more information, and to reserve tickets, see www.vox.nycopera.com.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Alan Gilbert, whose regime at the Philharmonic begins this fall, gives audiences a preview with two weeks of concerts that reflect the range of his mission. The first program tempts listeners with a deliciously French main course (Saint-Saëns's Violin Concerto No. 3, with Joshua Bell), surrounded by two Czech rarities (Dvořák's tone poem "The Golden Spinning Wheel" and Martinů's Symphony No. 4). (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. April 30 and May 5 at 7:30 and May 1-2 at 8.)

PHILHARMONIA BAROQUE ORCHESTRA
San Francisco's expert and vivacious period-performance band, under the direction of Nicholas McGegan, graces Zankel Hall with a slate of concertos by Corelli and Vivaldi, a selection of Handel opera arias, and Pergolesi's gorgeous Stabat Mater (with the soprano Carolyn Sampson and the countertenor Robin Blaze). (212-247-7800. April 30 at 7:30.)

AMERICAN COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA
This orchestra's name suggests breadth, but the final concert of the season finds it staying unusually close to home, offering premières by its artistic director, Robert Beaser (his Guitar Concerto, with the commanding Eliot Fisk), and its composer-in-residence, Derek Bermel. New blood comes courtesy of the noted Austrian composer Thomas Larcher and an immigrant New Yorker, the composer and percussionist Lukas Ligeti (the world première of his "Labyrinth of Clouds"). (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. May 1 at 7:30.)

PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA
Simon Rattle, a favorite of Philly's sumptuous band, brings it to Carnegie Hall for what should be a triumphant rendering of Berlioz's oratorio "La Damnation de Faust," with the assistance of the singers Gregory Kunde, Magdalena Kožená, Thomas Quasthoff, and Eric Owens, as well as the Philadelphia Singers Chorale. (212-247-7800. May 1 at 8.)

CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
The nation's finest orchestra offers a two-concert residency at Carnegie Hall, under the unshakable direction of its principal conductor, Bernard Haitink. May 2 at 8: Bruckner's magisterial Symphony No. 8 in C Minor. ♦ May 3 at 8: Blowsy early Webern ("Im Sommerwind") gives way to more mature works by Mahler (the "Rückert Lieder," with Christianne Stotijn) and Schubert (the Ninth Symphony). (212-247-7800.)

MINNESOTA ORCHESTRA
The parade of orchestras at Carnegie Hall continues, with Osmo Vänskä and his ensemble performing two of his specialties, Beethoven (the Symphony No. 7 in A Major) and Sibelius (including the Violin Concerto, with Leonidas Kavakos). (212-247-7800. May 4 at 8.)

SYMPHONYC: "FLECTION"
Paul Haas's chamber orchestra, known for its daring yearly forays into thematic programming, offers a concert at (Le) Poisson Rouge that focusses on a cynosure of American music: Barber's haunting Adagio for Strings, presented by itself and in alternation with electronic and acoustic interludes by Judd Greenstein, Paul Fowler, and Haas. (158 Bleecker St. 917-412-1848. May 5-6 at 7:30.)

RECITALS

KALICHSTEIN-LAREDO-ROBINSON TRIO
The honored ensemble joins with an impressive younger group, the Miami String Quartet, to offer the world première of a highly unusual composition—the Septet for Piano Trio and String Quartet, by one of its favorite composers, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich; music by Boccherini and Schumann (the Piano Quintet) completes the program. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. April 28-29 at 8.)

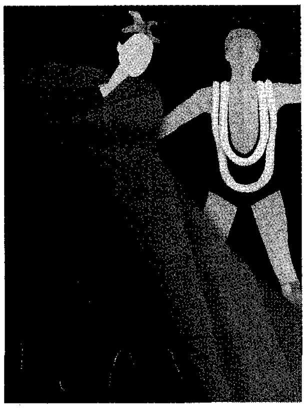
CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER: JERUSALEM QUARTET
A fifth musician is present in spirit when this energetic young group performs—Jacqueline du Pré, whose Sergio Peresson cello is played by Kyril Zlotnikov. String quartets by Haydn (the "Bird"), Bartók, and Borodin (the dulcet No. 2 in D Major) are featured on its Alice Tully Hall program. (212-875-5788. April 29 at 7:30.)

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

BLOOD AND THUNDER

"Clytemnestra" (1958), Martha Graham's Oresteia, is an evening-length dance into which she put just about everything she had. The piece shows her grandiosity, her love of Greek myth, her flashing treatment of time, her casual attitude to music, and her brilliant use of costumes and props. The unforgettable prop is the vast red cloak in which Clytemnestra greets her husband, Agamemnon, when he returns (with a new concubine) from the Trojan War. First, she spreads it across the front of the stage, as a mark of the family's royalty. Then she wraps herself in it, signalling her violent resolve. Finally, the servants stretch it up the stage to the palace. Agamemnon strides over it proudly; he thinks it's the red carpet. We know otherwise—it's a sign of the coming bloodbath. Graham made the title role for herself and danced it into her seventies, refusing to yield it to anyone else. When the Graham company appears at the Skirball Center May 12-16, Fang-yi Sheu—who, if it's possible, is as gutsy a performer as Graham was—will play the wrathful queen.

—*Joan Acocella*



SILIA GÖTZ

MITSUKO UCHIDA
The pianist brings her crystalline style to some of the Viennese classics she loves—music by Mozart, Beethoven (the Sonata No. 28 in A Major), Schumann (the Fantasy in C Major), and Berg. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. April 30 at 8.)

"TEREZÍN-THERESIENSTADT"
Music somehow survived in the Nazi death camps. A stellar roster of musicians—including the mezzo-soprano Anne Sofie von Otter and the violinist Daniel Hope—commemorate the composers who died in the Holocaust, performing songs and chamber pieces by such professionals as Schulhoff and Ullmann, as well as by the likes of Ilse Weber, a poet and a children's nurse. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. May 2 at 7:30.)

SHARON ISBIN
The 92nd Street Y, justly renowned for its "Art of the Guitar" series, hosts this refined soloist, who collaborates with the mezzo-soprano Gemma Coma-Alabert in a program rich in Spanish treasures by Albéniz, Rodrigo, Falla, and the playwright Lorca (who also composed). (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. May 2 at 8.)

YO-YO MA: "SELF COMES TO MIND"
The superstar cellist, a veteran of many nontraditional classical-music ventures, takes a detour off the Silk Road to make an interior journey—the performance of a new work exploring the evolution of human consciousness, by the composer Bruce Adolphe and the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, accompanied by an interactive video of actual brain images. (American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St. 212-769-5200. May 3 at 7.)

URSULA OPPENS
Always deftly balancing old and new music, the superb American pianist offers fantasy works by Beethoven (the Fantasy, Op. 77, and the "Eroica" Variations) and John Corigliano (the "Étude Fantasy," the "Fantasia on an Ostinato," and the New York première of "Winging It") in her upcoming concert at Symphony Space. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. May 5 at 8.)

RICHARD GOODE
Goode's programs are amiable, ruminative walks through well-worn avenues of the piano repertory. His latest concert offers a selection of works by Chopin (including a bevy of mazurkas and waltzes, the Barcarolle, and the Scherzo No. 3) and by one of the Polish composer's heroes, Bach (the Preludes and Fugues in G Minor, A Minor, and E Major from Book II of "The Well-Tempered Clavier"). (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. May 5 at 8.)

MOVIES OPENING

BATTLE FOR TERRA
A 3-D animated adventure story, about two teenagers who live on a distant and besieged planet. Directed by Aristomenis Tsirbas; with the voices of Justin Long and Evan Rachel Wood. Opening May 1. (In wide release.)

GHOSTS OF GIRLFRIENDS PAST
Matthew McConaughey stars in this romantic comedy, about a bachelor haunted by his failed relationships; co-starring Jennifer Garner, directed by Mark Waters. Opening May 1. (In wide release.)

ICE PEOPLE
Anne Aghion directed this documentary, about life in Antarctica. Opening May 1. (Anthology Film Archives.)

JAZZ IN THE DIAMOND DISTRICT
A drama, directed by Lindsey Christian, about a young woman (Monique Cameron) who struggles to realize her dream of becoming a singer. Opening May 1. (Quad Cinema.)

THE LIMITS OF CONTROL
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening May 1. (In limited release.)

THE MERRY GENTLEMAN
Michael Keaton directed and stars in this drama, about an older man's affair with a younger woman (Kelly Macdonald). Opening May 1. (First & 62nd Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

REVANCHE
Götz Spielmann directed this drama, set in Austria, about a petty criminal who commits a bank robbery in a small town. In German. Opening May 1. (IFC Center.)

THREE MONKEYS
A drama, directed by Nuri Bilge Ceylan, about a politician who has a car accident and persuades his chauffeur to take responsibility for it. In Turkish. Opening May 1. (Cinema Village.)

X-MEN ORIGINS: WOLVERINE
A prequel to the "X-Men" story, based on a comic-book character; directed by Gavin Hood, starring Hugh Jackman, Liev Schreiber, and Danny Huston. Opening May 1. (In wide release.)

Yo-Yo Ma performs at the American Museum of Natural History on May 3.

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

NOW PLAYING

ADVENTURELAND
The year is 1987, and a bunch of misfits who work at a dreary amusement park in Pittsburgh spend the summer grousing, toking up, and making out with one another. Greg Mottola's autobiographical movie is tenderly funny and lovable but also organically conceived—the colors, the music, and the moods all flow together. The picture has a melancholy lilt. The hero, James Brennan (Jesse Eisenberg), intellectual and excessively self-conscious, falls in love with Em (Kristen Stewart), a beautiful girl who hates her life and is lost in a sordid affair; James, making many mistakes along the way, slowly finds himself. This coming-of-age story is enlivened by Mottola's special generosity toward balled-up smart people who angrily reject conventional success yet remain desperate for acceptance. The manic Bill Hader and a silent, abashed Kristen Wiig play the couple who run the place; Martin Starr is a morosely unattractive Russian-lit major who complains about everything in the lugubrious drone of a campus coffee-shop wit. The only weak bit of casting is the Canadian actor Ryan Reynolds, who's too timid to play a good-looking cad with the proper conviction. The ghastly music playing endlessly on the park's loudspeakers is relieved by the music that the kids play for themselves, including Lou Reed, the Cure, and Hüsker Dü.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 4/13/09.) (In wide release.)

ANVIL! THE STORY OF ANVIL
Anybody schooled in "This Is Spinal Tap" could be forgiven for assuming that there was no further amusement, let alone rarer emotions, to be mined from heavy metal. Somehow, though, Sacha Gervasi's documentary digs deep into a real-life case—the attempted resurrection of Anvil, which was founded in the early nineteen-seventies and banged heads with fame in the eighties—to emerge with a saga of devotion and perseverance that seems at once touching and absurd. Gervasi is especially fortunate in having the founding fathers of the group, Robb Reiner and Steve (Lips) Kudlow, now in creased middle age, to guide us through its many downs and very occasional ups. The action stretches from their native Canada to Transylvania, via Japan and Stonehenge (the last being an obvious must-see for any druid-haired rocker). By the end, to our surprise, we mind very much whether the fortunes of Anvil are set to soar or doomed to lurch once more; if most of their music sounds like a fight in a lumber mill, who cares?—*Anthony Lane* (4/20/09) (In limited release.)

CLUNY BROWN
Ernst Lubitsch's last completed film, from 1946, looks back to the prewar year of 1938 to take stock of the new world and to show how it got that way. The story concerns Adam Belinski (Charles Boyer), a Czechoslovakian professor and anti-Fascist, who takes refuge in London and then is invited to an English country manor, where his liberal ironies shake up the staid household. He bonds with the title character (Jennifer Jones), one of the maids, a plumber's nubile niece, who likes nothing better than to unblock stopped-up drains with "one good bang"—just one of the movie's many gleefully risqué allusions. Belinski's story, in Lubitsch's telling, is that of so many smart European refugees whose cultured and free-thinking ways inspired stopped-up England (and, as things turn out, the United States, too) to unblock itself and take up the fight against Hitler and for sex—

not least by producing effervescently ribald entertainments, such as this one, for the benefit of spirited yet constrained young women. It's Lubitsch's own story, and that of the Hollywood he knew. With Reginald Owen as an upper-class fop who knows Hitler as the author of an "outdoors" book, "My Camp."—*Richard Brody* (BAM; May 2.)

GOODBYE SOLO

A taxi passenger named William (Red West), perhaps seventy, a pouchy-eyed white Southerner, demands to be taken, in a week's time, to a mountain perch outside the city called Blowing Rock. We're in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and the driver, Solo (Souleymane Sy Savane), a Senegalese immigrant, young, handsome, and endlessly cheerful, refuses to help William carry out his apparent plan for suicide. Solo tries to reconcile his passenger to life, even moving in with him in his motel room, where they make a very strange couple. The independent writer-director Ramin Bahrani establishes the streets of Winston-Salem clearly enough, particularly at its squalid edges. Yet the movie, with the help of its realistic base, lifts off into an existential fable: one man's exuberant embrace of life crashes into the other's adamant rejection of it. Why does the old man want to die and the young man so badly need to save him? The power of the fable is derived from Bahrani's unwillingness to solve these mysteries beyond a few hints. Red West has a voice like raw whiskey; Savane's smile and rapid movements light up any space that he inhabits. You will think of them both for days after seeing the movie.—*D.D.* (4/13/09) (In limited release.)

IL DIVO

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Sunshine Cinema.)

MONSTERS VS. ALIENS

A new animated feature from DreamWorks, directed by Rob Letterman and Conrad Vernon, in which a prospective bride (voiced by Reese Witherspoon) has her wedding day rudely interrupted by a falling meteorite. The impact leaves her as tall as the Chrysler Building, whereupon she is co-opted by the military and forced to join a squad of outlandish creatures, ranging from the politely inventive to the merely gelatinous, and voiced by Seth Rogen, Will Arnett, and Hugh Laurie. Their task, as you would expect, is to save the planet; this they proceed to do, against the threat of a dome-headed warmonger and his evil clones. There is little here that would not have crossed the minds of sci-fi enthusiasts in the nineteen-fifties, and, for all its digital novelty, the movie has the distinct air of a throwback. Still, it whips along briskly enough (even if the best gags, as ever, are in the trailer) and feels blessedly free of the in-jokes that have clogged up recent DreamWorks projects. Best seen in 3-D, if you can find the right theatre, though the extra dimension continues to seem less an inspiration than a stunt.—*A.L.* (4/6/09) (In wide release.)

OBSERVE AND REPORT

A rancid and unpleasant "black comedy" about a stupid mall security guard (Seth Rogen) who has delusions of grandeur. It's the kind of movie in which everyone but the hero and a chaste innocent (Collette Wolfe) turns out to be rotten and corrupt, and the director keeps scoring off the hapless characters, as if nastiness were some new form of hip. It doesn't work: the jokes are just sour, the violence is miserably staged, and the actors, including Anna Faris, Ray Liotta, Michael Peña, and Celia Weston, get trashed. The plot is devoted to a chubby middle-aged flasher who terrorizes the mall. The movie's audience gets treated in much the same way as the flasher's victims. Written and directed by Jody Hill (a co-creator of the TV series "Eastbound & Down").—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

SALT OF THIS SEA

Propaganda, but realized with verve, sincerity, and an unusual blend of documentary texture and theatrical energy. The Palestinian filmmaker Annemarie Jacir tells the story of Soraya (Suheir Hammad), a young Brooklyn-born woman of Palestinian ancestry who travels to Ramallah to reclaim an emotional heritage as well as a material one: the long-dormant bank account of her grandfather, who was born in Yaffa but left in 1948. There, while dealing with the bureaucracy, she tries to stir up her hosts, whose acceptance of a two-state solution she ridicules. Though Soraya's financial quest is ultimately frustrated, she makes friends, notably Emad (Saleh Bakri), a waiter preparing to emigrate to Canada, and Marwan (Riyad Ideis), a filmmaker, and together they devise a plot to rob a bank and—disguised as Jews—enter Israel in order to visit their lost family homes. The smoldering force of Hammad's performance takes on an extraordinary poignancy with her longing looks and tender caresses of ancient walls in Israel. Though the politics are rigged, the emotions are authentic and strong; the results of Soraya's spree may well be the filmmaker's best argument against her point of view. In Arabic, English, and Hebrew.—*R.B.* (Tribeca Film Festival; April 30-May 2.)

17 AGAIN

Wasn't once enough? Mike O'Donnell (Matthew Perry), an ironic, self-hating failed father and husband, is transported by an angel back to his seventeen-year-old self, in the person of the brazenly self-confident Zac Efron. But he's not his seventeen-year-old self in the past; it's still the present, and no one seems to notice Perry's absence or the resemblance of this smirking young man to the teen-age version of Perry. There are some embarrassing scenes in which Efron comes on to Perry's grownup wife (Leslie Mann), and still more embarrassing scenes in which their daughter comes on to him. The fantasy is mostly whimsical and arbitrary. Efron's self-assurance as a performer is the main thing the movie has going for it. Directed by Burr Steers; written by Jason Filardi.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

THE SOLOIST

A star reporter for the Los Angeles *Times*, Steve Lopez (Robert Downey, Jr.), befriends a classically trained musician, Nathaniel Ayers (Jamie Foxx), who suffers from schizophrenia and lives on the Los Angeles streets. Downey approaches him with a mixture of professional curiosity and practiced caution. In return, Foxx doesn't look at him much. Turning away, he talks rapidly and lightly, praising Beethoven, always Beethoven, complete with opus numbers. He's not dangerous, but he's not sane, either, and the filmmakers—the screenwriter Susannah Grant (adapting Lopez's book) and the director Joe Wright—don't pretend that friendship can cure madness or that great music can heal wounds that have been open for years. Wright flies over L.A.'s tangled freeways like the angels hovering over Berlin in "Wings of Desire," and he turns Nathaniel's attendance at rehearsals of the Los Angeles Philharmonic into a bliss-out. But then he comes back to earth. Outside a shelter, the director assembles what seems like every lost and wrecked person in the city and halts the story to let them tell their tales. They make their own kind of music. Most of the rest is from Beethoven's Third and Ninth Symphonies. It's hard to see how music and a sympathetic reporter can redeem a messy American city, but this movie makes a plausible case for so fervent a dream.—*D.D.* (4/27/09) (In wide release.)

STATE OF PLAY

This dark-alley journalism story crossed with a suspense thriller and much else—such as adultery and conspiracy—is based on a six-hour BBC miniseries, and, despite some sharp dialogue and good acting, it doesn't add up to much. A crusading young congressman (a thinner Ben Affleck) is investigating a Blackwater-type private security company when his chief researcher, who is also his mistress, is pushed into the path of an oncoming subway train. The ace newspaper reporter Cal McAffrey (Russell Crowe), a close friend of the congressman's, gets on the case and uncovers the threat posed by the company, while his acidulous editor (Helen Mirren) wants to pursue the tabloid side of the scandal. Crowe is shapeless now, his complexion pasty, his hair long and lank. But there's enormous life in his eyes and voice. He seems every inch a great journalist; it's not his fault that the filmmakers let the story slip through their fingers. The three screenwriters (Matthew Michael Carnahan, Tony Gilroy, and Billy Ray) may have been trying to compress too much into two hours. With Jason Bateman, who is skittishly brilliant as a cynical public-relations guy who panics when he realizes he's in over his head, and Rachel McAdams, as a blogger who has to learn what real reporting is like. Kevin Macdonald, the director, displays a pleasant nostalgia for the scut work of newspaper reporting.—*D.D.* (4/27/09) (In wide release.)

SUGAR

There is, certainly, a great movie to be made about a young baseball player from the islands or South America who enters an American-run baseball academy, gets a tryout with a minor-league franchise, suffers the cultural dislocations of American wealth and strangeness, and then, on the verge of success, hits a rock somewhere and capsizes before he can get to the majors. This film, alas, is no more than the template for such a movie. The writer-director team of Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck want to overturn the usual triumphalist sports narrative, but the elements of their counter-narrative are sketched in without any particular conviction or strength. Algenis Perez Soto, as Miguel, the handsome and talented young Dominican pitcher, looks the part, but Miguel suffers nothing more than routine difficulties and setbacks. His pulling away from baseball is not determined by anything we see on screen, and it feels like a misplaced cultural judgment—American capitalism, or something, did him in. Or are the filmmakers suggesting that Miguel is too hampered by guilt or vanity to succeed? Their message—that a good life can be had outside baseball—comes off as a dim and high-minded consolation prize. This is a tragic sports movie that shies away from every element of tragedy.—*D.D.* (In limited release.)

TREELESS MOUNTAIN

So Yong Kim's second feature, a well-meaning yet underimagined glimpse into the lives of two troubled South Korean girls—Jin (Hee-yeon Kim), a bright young primary-school student, and her little sister, Bin (Song-hee Kim)—stays on the surface of their problems as it presses viewers' compassion buttons. Their caring yet distressed mother goes off in search of her estranged husband and parks the girls with their aunt (Mi-hyang Kim), a crude alcoholic who is neither tender nor attentive and leaves them largely to their own devices. It's hard not to be charmed by the poised young stars, despite the weakness of So Yong Kim's writing and direction. The girls' loneliness, brave efforts at self-reliance, and disappointments are distilled into scenes that push the plot along with a mechanical bluntness; every detail fits puzzle-like into a story that the prettified cinematography disguises as loosely constructed; and moony closeups take the place of insight into character. The thinness of dialogue, absence of whimsy, and lack of context turn these real girls into symbols; the sympathy they arouse is vague and generic. In Korean.—*R.B.* (Film Forum.)

TYSON

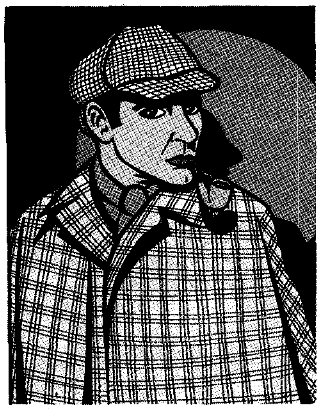
After seeing this fascinating James Toback documentary about Mike Tyson, one can never again think of the fighter as a simpleminded thug. He's a very complex-minded thug indeed, full of contradictions, which he articulates with considerable detail and feeling. The man we see is sad and vulnerable and ferocious all at once—frightened as a virtually parentless boy in Brooklyn who was robbed by neighborhood kids, then remorseless as a baby gangster robbing drug dealers. In detention in upstate New York, he was steered into boxing and wound up in the hands of the great trainer Cus D'Amato, who took him in, fathered him, and got him to concentrate his strength and rage into a relentless attack in which speed—a hail of punches—drives through his opponents' defenses. The rest is bravado, boasting, good and bad times with many women and hangers-on, enormous earnings (most of them blown), and wrenching self-criticism and self-abnegation. Toback doesn't press Tyson on the rape conviction that sent him to prison for three years. (Tyson claims he was innocent.) He lets Tyson speak at great length, and we are free to judge the self-mythologizing, which, however overblown, cannot blur the genuinely tragic story of an ignorant street kid's precipitous rise and disastrous fall.—*D.D.* (In limited release.)

VALENTINO: THE LAST EMPEROR

The opulent life style and fabulous haute-couture fashions of the great designer Valentino are presented in all their splendor in this documentary by Matt Tyrnauer. The film covers Valentino's final two years at work before his retirement and the grand forty-fifth-anniversary party, in 2007, celebrating his fashions. The film isn't a biography; Tyrnauer simply follows the designer around and captures the moments. And, between the life beyond luxury (the

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
HIS PRIVATE "I"

In his gracious and melancholy film "The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes" (1970), screening April 30 at BAM, Billy Wilder spoofs the legend of the great detective without quite overthrowing it. This Holmes, as embodied by


THIERRY GUITARD

Robert Stephens, is sexually ambiguous, vain, cocaine-addicted, and a bit of a crackpot; he's astute about tiny details while missing the important things that happen to him. Yet he has an indefinable dignity—produced, perhaps, by a sense that his great days are over. After an amusing prologue in which Holmes backs away from performing stud services for a Russian ballerina, he is drawn into intrigue by a beautiful, dishevelled, and often naked woman (Genevieve Page) who shows up at Baker Street. The movie proceeds at a leisurely pace—it's witty rather than suspenseful, and lovingly photographed. Colin Blakely is the sputtering Dr. Watson, and Christopher Lee, even more severe than Stephens, shows up as Sherlock's implacably intelligent brother, Mycroft. I. A. L. Diamond collaborated with Wilder on the script.
—*David Denby*

Roman villa, the French château, the yacht, the skiing in Gstaad) and the workers in his showroom (including his prickly genius seamstress and her assistants, who dress in white when handling the fabrics), there's plenty to choose from. But the film's main focus is Valentino's forty-five years with his business and life partner, Giancarlo Giammetti, whose attentiveness and devotion to the designer are sincerely moving. It's a stirring relationship, and Tyrnauer's film catches what genuinely feels like the end of an era. By the time we get to the party, for which the Colosseum is bathed in blue light as a backdrop for wire-dancing acrobats dressed in Valentino red, the Felliniesque-ness of it all can bring tears to our eyes.—*Bruce Diones* (In limited release.)

WILD BILL
This 1995 Western, directed by Walter Hill, starts out as a ripsnorting bio-pic of James Butler Hickok (1837-76), a scout for the Union Army in the Civil War, and then a lawman, a gambler, and a gunfighter—but as soon as Hickok hits the boomtown of Deadwood, in the Dakota Territory, it turns into a memory play. Black-and-white images of Hickok's life slither through his brain as the past comes back to haunt him in the person of his soon-to-be assassin, Jack McCall (David Arquette). The story winds up as a Beckett-like existential farce: McCall can't quite work himself up to kill Wild Bill and the hero ponders whether his own life is worth saving. As Bill, Jeff Bridges has dash and size and depth—stoic fury and heroic resignation. The robust, voluble James Gammon, as Bill's buffalo-hunting partner, California Joe, and the deft, courtly John Hurt, as an English gambler named Charley Prince (who narrates), are classic sidekicks. Diane Lane, as Bill's ravaged true love, Susannah Moore (in this telling, McCall's mother), and Ellen Barkin, as a blustery, yearning Calamity Jane (she wants Bill to love her as he loved Susannah), are spirited rural heroines. They fill boots vacated by Hollywood legends long ago. But the movie is no sentimental throwback; it looks at the Old West with both eyes open—and doesn't blink.—*Michael Sragow* (MOMA; April 29-30.)

Also Playing

FAST & FURIOUS: In wide release. **HANNAH MONTANA THE MOVIE:** In wide release. **I LOVE YOU, MAN:** In wide release. **KNOWING:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The films of Marina Goldovskaya. All films are in Russian. May 1 at 7:30: "Solovky Power" (1988). ♦ May 2 at 7:30: "The House on Abbat Street" (1993), screening with "The Prince Is Back" (1999/2003), followed by a Q. & A. with the director. ♦ May 3 at 7:30: "The Shattered Mirror: A Journal of a Time of Trouble" (1992) and "Three Songs About Motherland" (2008), followed by a Q. & A. with the director.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—Special screenings. April 29 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Super, Girls!" (2007, Jian Yi; in Mandarin). The 6:50 screening will be followed by a conversation with the director. ♦ May 4 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "Waltz with Bashir" (2008, Ari Folman; in Hebrew, German, English, and Arabic). The 6:50 screening will be followed by a Q. & A. with the art director, David Polonski. ♦ Through May 21: "The Late Film." April 30 at 6:50 and 9:30: "The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes" (1970, Billy Wilder). ♦ May 1 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Street of Shame" (1956, Kenji Mizoguchi; in Japanese). ♦ May 2 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Cluny Brown" (†). ♦ May 3 at 2:45, 6, and 9:15: "Eyes Wide Shut" (1999, Stanley Kubrick). ♦ May 5 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "Cracking Up," a.k.a. "Smorgasbord" (1983, Jerry Lewis).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. April 29-30 at 1, 2:50, 4:40, 6:30, 8:20, and 10:10: "Viridiana" (1961, Luis Buñuel; in Spanish). ♦ May 1-7: "Easy Rider" (1969, Dennis Hopper).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—The films of Satyajit Ray. April 29 at 1 and 6:15: "Satyajit Ray, Filmmaker" (1982, Shyam Benegal; in Bengali). ♦ April 29 at 3:40 and 8:50: "The Middleman" (Satyajit Ray, 1975; in Bengali). ♦ "Lyubov Orlova, First Lady of the Soviet Screen." All films are in Russian and are directed by Grigori Aleksandrov. May 1 at 1, May 3 at 8:15, and May 4 at 6:15: "Jolly Fellows," a.k.a. "Moscow Laughs" (1934). ♦ May 1 at 3, May 2 at 8:20, and May 3 at 6:20: "The Circus" (1936). ♦ May 1 at 5 and May 2 and May 4 at 4:10: "The Shining Path," a.k.a. "Tanya" (1940). ♦ May 1 at 7:10, May 2 and May 4 at 2, and May 3 at 4:10: "Volga Volga" (1938). ♦ May 1 at 9:20, May 2 at 6:15, and May 3 at 2: "Spring" (1947).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—"World Nomads Haiti." May 5 at 12:30, 4, and 7: "The Agronomist" (2004, Jonathan Demme). The 7:00 screening will be followed by a Q. & A. with the journalist Michèle Montas and the director.

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Waverly Midnights." May 1-2: "Eraserhead" (1977, David Lynch). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. May 5 at 8: "Art and Copy" (2009, Doug Pray).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"The Old West: Myth, Character, and Reinvention." April 29-30 at 1:30: "Wild Bill" (†). ♦ "Kino! At Thirty," films from Germany. All films are in German. April 29 at 4: "November Child" (2008, Christian Schwochow). ♦ April 30 at 4: "The Merchant of Four Seasons" (1971, Rainer Werner Fassbinder). ♦ The films of Mike Nichols. April 30 at 4:30 and May 1 at 8: "Charlie Wilson's War" (2007). ♦ April 30 at 8: "Catch-22" (1970). ♦ May 1 at 4:30: "Biloxi Blues" (1988). ♦ The films of Julien Duvivier. Except where noted, all films are in French. May 1 at 7 and May 3 at 5:30: "Poil de Carotte" (1932; in French). The May 1 screening will be introduced by Lenny Borger, the series' co-curator. ♦ May 2 at 1:30 and May 4 at 8: "Allo Berlin? Ici Paris!" (1932; in French and German). ♦ May 2 at 5: "A Man's Neck" (1933). ♦ May 2 at 8: "Panique" (1946). ♦ May 3 at 2:30 and May 4 at 4:30: "Poil de Carotte" (1925; silent). ♦ Special screening. May 4 at 4: "Flower in the Pocket" (2007, Liew Seng Tat).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART
150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." May 1 at 9:30: "Contempt" (1963, Jean-Luc Godard; in French, English, Italian, and German), introduced by the artist Vito Acconci.

TRIBECA FILM FESTIVAL
Screenings are held at locations throughout New York; for more program information and complete schedule, visit www.tribecafilm.com/festival or call 866-941-3378.—April 29-30 at 6:45 and May 1 at 2: "Fish Eyes" (2009, Wei Zheng; in Mandarin). ♦ April 29 at 7:45, May 1 at 11:30, and May 2 at 11:30 A.M.: "All About Actresses" (2008, Maïwenn; in French). ♦ April 30 at 6:15, May 1 at 11:45 A.M., and May 2 at 2:30: "Salt of This Sea" (†) ♦ April 30 at 10:30, May 2 at 12:30, and May 3 at 5: "Playground" (2008, Libby Spears).

READINGS AND TALKS

PEN WORLD VOICES FESTIVAL
More than a hundred and sixty international authors and translators gather for lectures and readings in various locations around town from April 27 to May 3. Among the many events are a discussion about the economic crisis with Bill Bradley, Niall Ferguson, Paul Krugman, Nouriel Roubini, George Soros, and others, on April 30; an afternoon with graphic novelists, including Neil Gaiman, Yoshihiro Tatsumi, and Adrian Tomine, on May 2; and a four-hundredth-anniversary celebration of Henry Hudson's arrival in the New

World, with the writers Ian Buruma, Geert Mak, and Russell Shorto, on May 3. (For a complete schedule and details about venues, visit www.pen.org.)

POETRY SOCIETY OF AMERICA
X. J. Kennedy, this year's winner of the society's Frost Medal, delivers the keynote address at its annual award ceremony. Linda Gregg, Susan Kinsolving, Ron Padgett, and Gary Young, who are also receiving awards, will read from their work. (National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park S. No tickets necessary. April 29 at 7.)

BOWERY POETRY CLUB
The poets Galway Kinnell and Taylor Mali share the stage. (308 Bowery, at Bleecker St. 212-614-0505. April 29 at 8.)

TIPA PROJECT READING
TIPA, which stands for Toward International Peace Through the Arts and is the work of the marketer turned activist Stan Tannen, presents a tribute to Abraham Lincoln, with Marian Seldes, Brían F. O'Byrne, Frances Sternhagen, Fritz Weaver, Jeremy Irons, Tammy Grimes, and other actors reading works from the Library of America's new anthology devoted to the sixteenth President. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. No tickets necessary. May 1 at 12:30.)

ABRAHAM LINCOLN BRIGADE TRIBUTE
Recently discovered photographs of refugees from the Spanish Civil War, taken by Robert Capa and David (Chim) Seymour, will be presented during an event celebrating the American volunteers who fought Fascism during that war. Sebastiaan Faber, of Oberlin College, will talk about the pictures; Angela Giral, whose grandfather was the Prime Minister of the Spanish Republic from July to September of 1936, and others will also be on hand. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. For more information, call 212-674-5398. May 3 at 2.)

WORDTHEATRE READING
The Los Angeles-based nonprofit WordTheatre has brought its reading series east. On May 3 at 3, the actors Brian Cox, Kevin Corrigan, and Nicole Ansari read stories by Steve Almond, Dan Chaon, and Susan Orlean, respectively. (Soho House New York, 29-35 Ninth Ave. For tickets and more information about the series, call 310-915-5150, or visit www.wordtheatre.com.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

KENTUCKY DERBY
For the past decade, Michael Boyd, a native Kentuckian who lives in Cobble Hill, Brooklyn, has thrown an annual party to celebrate the running of the Kentucky Derby. The gathering started in his apartment, but has had to move to a series of larger and larger local venues. This year, it's at the Bell House, a newish club on the edge of Park Slope. A barbecue outside the club (where an ice-cream truck will be parked) will be followed by square dancing inside, mint juleps (naturally), a live call to the post by the bugler Jason Rambler, and a rendition of "My Old Kentucky Home" by the vocalist Carolyn Sills. The race itself, which is at 6, will be presented on large-screen televisions. It will be over in a New York minute (more or less), but the party is set to continue with a live-band karaoke competition and an award ceremony where Best Formal Hat, Most Sharply Dressed Man, and other sartorial prizes will be presented. (149 7th St., between Second and Third Aves., Brooklyn. 718-643-6510. May 2, starting at 2.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Has the art market bottomed out? **Sotheby's** will be the first to test the waters at its evening sale of Impressionist and modern art on May 5, led by a beguiling portrait by Picasso of his daughter Maya, all bright colors and soft shapes (painted only months after "Guernica"), and a willowy sculpture of a cat on the prowl ("Le Chat") by Giacometti. The two-day auction of modern and contemporary prints that precedes it (April 30-May 1) is a bit more laid-back, offering a large selection of Warhols and Picassos, as well as a melancholy Whistler etching of the Basilica of Santa Maria della Salute, bathed in a thick Venetian fog. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ **Swann** will also be laying out a selection of prints (April 30), from Old Masters to artists of the twentieth century, followed by an auction devoted to a private collection of *livres d'artiste* (May 5), limited editions richly illustrated with original prints, including works by Braque, Calder, and Matisse. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.) ♦ A visit to the International Fine Art Fair, at the Park Avenue Armory (May 1-5), is a pleasant way to spend an afternoon. Old Master paintings abound, as do second-tier Impressionist canvases and works by American artists, such as a lush landscape by George Inness, "Coming Thunderstorm" (offered by Questroyal Fine Art). The Milan gallery Voena will show an oil sketch by Tintoretto, as well as a sumptuous depiction of that favorite Baroque subject, Salome presenting the head of John the Baptist on a tray, by the Spanish painter Juan Bautista Mayno. (Park Avenue at 67th St. 212-642-8572.)

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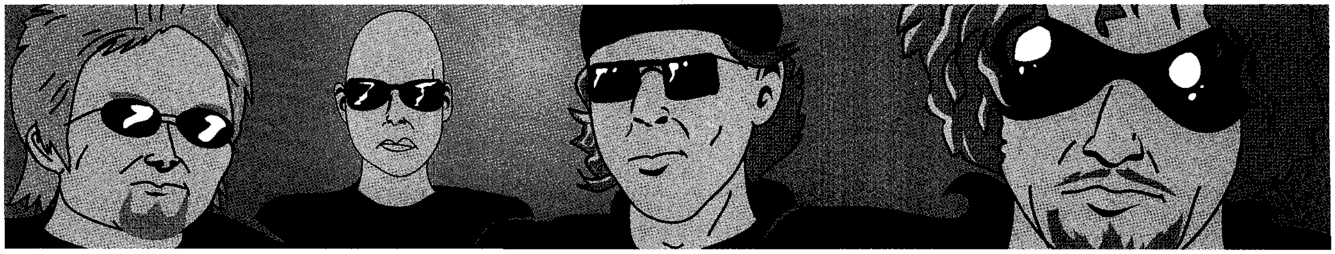


MAXIMILIAN BODE

Chickenfoot, at the Fillmore New York at Irving Plaza.

ON THE HORIZON

MOVIES
STARS AND STRIPES
May 8-21

This month, Film Forum has programmed by pun: a few days before the Cannes Film Festival gets under way, it's launching the Con Film Festival, featuring classics set in prisons, including Raoul Walsh's "White Heat," John Ford's "The Prisoner of Shark Island," and a double feature of the Coen brothers' "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" and the Preston Sturges film that inspired its title, "Sullivan's Travels." (212-727-8110.)

DANCE
SAINTS CHRISTOPHER
May 12-16

The downtown choreographer Christopher Williams conjures medieval Europe in "The Golden Legend," a collection of dance portraits of seventeen male saints, at Dance Theatre Workshop. As usual, Williams doesn't stint on fantastical costumes or live music. (212-924-0077.)

ART
TOUCH TYPE
May 14-June 14

The Brazilian artist Ernesto Neto has a hands-on approach to sculpture—visitors to his room-size installations are expected to touch what they see. In "Anthropodino," Neto will turn the drill hall of the Park Avenue Armory into a giant soft-sculpture labyrinth. (212-616-3930.)

NIGHT LIFE
OLD SCHOOL
May 28

They may have a silly name, but the members of the new group Chickenfoot—the guitar whiz Joe Satriani, the Red Hot Chili Peppers' drummer Chad Smith, the former Van Halen bassist Michael Anthony, and the erstwhile Van Halen front man Sammy Hagar—know more than a thing or two about how to rock. They come to the Fillmore New York at Irving Plaza. (www.chickenfoot.us.)

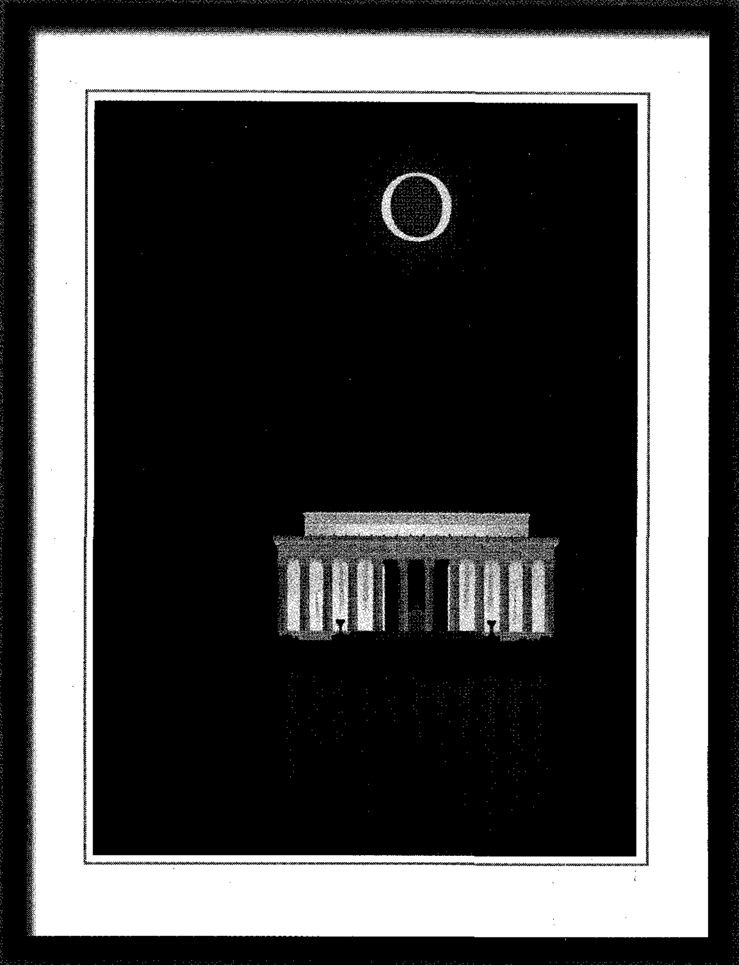
CLASSICAL MUSIC
GENESIS
May 31

In "Composing a Nation," Leon Botstein conducts the American Symphony Orchestra in a concert of music by the Israeli composers Josef Tal and Paul Ben-Haim, among others. (212-721-6500.)

Advertisement

REFLECTION

by Bob Staake
Issue date: November 17, 2008



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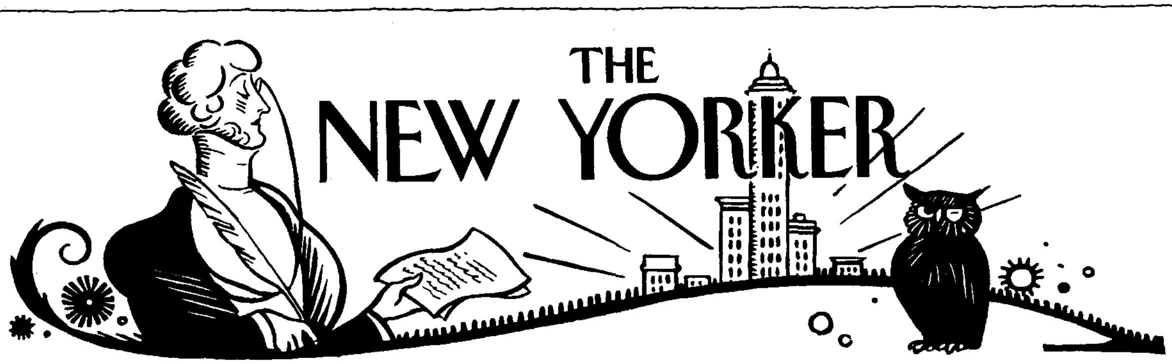
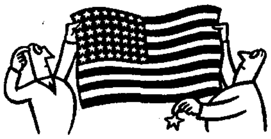


THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
SO LONG, PARDNER



Question: What do you think about the idea of secession or sovereignty for your state?

Governor Perry, of Texas: Oh, I think there's a lot of different scenarios.

On April 15th, a.k.a. tax day, protest rallies promoted by conservative lobbyists and Fox News television hosts attracted a couple of hundred thousand people to a couple of hundred locations around the country. The rallies were called "tea parties"—more mad than Boston, by the look and sound of them—with "tea" standing for "Taxed Enough Already." The partygoers' main target was President Obama's plan for an enormous tax hike, under which, starting in 2011, persons with incomes in excess of a quarter-million dollars could see their top marginal rate go from thirty-five per cent to 39.6. This means that a fellow making, for example, three hundred grand could see his tax bill go up $34.62 per week. (In a typical liberal trick, most people making under a quarter mil, which is to say ninety-seven per cent of us, are getting a reduction.)

Lifting the burden of taxation from the backs of the comfortable is no longer the exciting new panacea it was back in the nineteen-eighties. But another proposal that the tea parties were buzzing about merits the respectful consideration of concerned citizens: Governor Rick Perry's suggestion that Texas might end its association with the United States of America and strike out on its own.

Independence wouldn't be a huge stretch for Texas. It already has its own national flag, left over from its decade as a sovereign republic. As a result, transition expenses should be minimal. At the Austin tea party, Governor Perry, still flushed with the excitement of denouncing federal oppression from the platform, told reporters, "When we came in the union, in 1845, one of the issues was that we would be able to leave if we decided to do that." He added, a little ominously:

> My hope is that America, and Washington in particular, pays attention. We've got a great Union. There's absolutely no reason to dissolve it. But if Washington continues to thumb their nose at the American people, who knows what might come out of that.

Or, translated into New Yorkese: Nice little Union you got there. Be a shame if anything happened to it.

The Governor is mistaken about Texas having been admitted to the Union with an opt-out provision; the actual deal was that Texas, with Congress's permission, could theoretically divide itself into five states. Exiting the United States is not as simple as resigning from a restricted country club. Since "the Constitution, in all its provisions, looks to an indestructible Union" (Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase, Texas v. White, 1869), Perry would need either a constitutional amendment or a Supreme Court chock-full of Scaliaesque "originalists."

Putting aside the technicalities, though, what about the merits? Secession has been in questionable odor ever since Fort Sumter, but there are big differences between then and now. The cause of the Civil War was slavery, and the white South's determination, in Lincoln's phrase, "to strengthen, perpetuate, and extend" it. That was something worth fighting against, if not worth fighting for. But a difference of opinion about a marginal tax rate? There is, to be sure, a superficial parallel: just as only a minority of Southern whites owned slaves, only a tiny minority of Texans are due for a tax increase. It's an aspirational thing. According to a poll taken the other day, a mere third of the people of the Lone Star State, and only half of Texas Republicans, are currently inclined to secede. But, if the numbers mount, might it not be better for all concerned if we just let Texas—and, by extension, any other parts of the old Confed-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

eracy that wish to accompany it—go?

Despite Perry's fighting words, there is no reason for the separation to be an occasion for violence. The globe is replete with two-state solutions: India and Pakistan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Israel and Palestine. Admittedly, these may not be the best examples. A closer parallel would be Czechoslovakia, which, in 1993, split peacefully into the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Like Czechs and Slovaks, Americans and Texans speak closely related languages, share a common, if not equally intense, interest in football games (though the Dallas Cowboys could no longer style themselves "America's Team"), and enjoy each other's cuisines. (Houston has a number of acceptable organic fusion restaurants, and there is a pretty fair barbecue place just a block from *The New Yorker's* offices.) The border between the United States and the Federated States ("Confederate" being a word that remains a little too provocative) might not be as trouble-free as that between the United States and Canada, but, compared to the border with Mexico, it would probably require somewhat fewer armed citizen militias and fences topped with concertina wire to thwart illegal aliens desperate for a better life. On balance, trade relations between the U.S. and the F.S. would be advantageous to both. Cultural exchanges, tourism, and even a degree of military coöperation would be far from unthinkable.

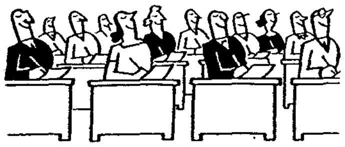
For the old country, the benefits would be obvious. A more intimately sized Congress would briskly enact sensible gun control, universal health insurance, and ample support for the arts, the humanities, and the sciences. Although Texas itself has been a net contributor to the Treasury—it gets back ninety-four cents for each dollar it sends to Washington—nearly all the other potential F.S. states, especially the ones whose politicians complain most loudly about the federal jackboot, are on the dole. (South Carolina, for example, receives $1.35 on the dollar, as compared with Illinois's seventy-five cents.) Republicans would have a hard time winning elections for a generation or two, but eventually a responsible opposition party would emerge, along the lines of Britain's Conservatives, and a normal alternation in power could return.

The Federated States, meanwhile, could get on with the business of protecting the sanctity of marriage, mandating organized prayer sessions and the teaching of creationism in schools, and giving the theory that eliminating taxes increases government revenues a fair test. Although Texas and the other likely F.S. states already conduct some eighty-six per cent of executions, their death rows remain clogged with thousands of prisoners kept alive by meddling judges. These would be rapidly cleared out, providing more prison space for abortion providers. Although there might be some economic dislocation at first, the F.S. could remedy this by taking advantage of its eligibility for OPEC membership and arranging a new "oil shock." Failing that, foreign aid could be solicited from Washington. But the greatest benefit would be psychological: freed from the condescension of metropolitan élites and Hollywood degenerates, the new country could tap its dormant creativity and develop a truly distinctive Way of Life.

Not every Southerner would be eager to go along with the new order, so delicate diplomacy would be a must. New Orleans might have to be made a "free city," like Danzig (now Gdańsk) between the world wars. If partitioning Austin along the lines of Cold War Berlin proved unfeasible, peacekeeping troops might have to be sent in. But, before long, living side by side in peace and tranquillity, we could all say either "God bless the United States of America" or "God bless the Federated States," as the case may be.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

CAREER COUNSELLING TAKE TWO



On a recent weekday morning, a laid-off trading-floor worker and a laid-off control officer were sitting in the basement of the Levin Institute, a business school in a town house on East Fifty-fifth Street, drinking coffee and talking about life after Wall Street. They were both in their forties and were wearing oxford-cloth shirts and khakis.

"I've been out since November," Andrew Lubow, who had been at the Bank of New York Mellon, said. "November was dead. January was beyond dead—it was ten feet under. The job search only really began in February."

"I was laid off in September," Ed Keever said. "Oppenheimer & Co." He had found work at a friend's company, removing mold from office buildings. "It was very manual," he said. "You have to wear a mask and sometimes a full Tyvek suit. We looked like the men from Mars." He paused. "When I was little, I wanted to be a dentist."

The men were participants in Jump-Start NYC, a free, government-funded program that is training laid-off Wall Streeters for new careers, the idea being that, even if you've come to terms with no paycheck, trying to do business without a *Barron's* subscription or a Bloomberg terminal can take some getting used to. The hope is that the program's graduates, after their attitude makeovers, will join startup companies. Tom Moebus, the school's development director, had sorted through almost two hundred applications for the fifty spots, and he thought the candidates showed an encouraging degree of self-knowledge ("My strengths lie in customer service/support. My other big strength is in being a 'right hand man' "); goal-setting ("I now hope to start a brewery in New York"); and introspection (a former trader: "Having spent several years following the foot soldiers of Wall Street, head-to-toe, I find myself at the focal point of self-reflection. Where am I? What am I doing? . . . These are questions tattooed into my psyche").

It was Day Three of boot camp: each student was supposed to practice managing the budget for a pretend startup company. (The second phase of the program is an unpaid internship.) Lubow and Keever put down their coffee and joined the other students in an auditorium. The teacher was Chris Trimble, from Dartmouth's Tuck School of Business. "We're going to get you right into some fast-paced decision-making!" he said. He walked to a whiteboard and drew a series of bubbles, which he labelled "dashboard," "pilot," "weather," and "complex system of moving parts." Running a company, he said, is like piloting a plane. Trimble asked, "Is anybody a fan of the movie 'The Right

Stuff'? Early on, there are scenes of Chuck Yeager going up in an aircraft called the X-1." He went on, "He's on an unproven aircraft, and some of those indicators aren't working so well." The Wall Streeters looked worried. "O.K., let's get flying!"

The students split into teams of three and opened their laptops to work on small-business simulations, which were a bit like games of SimCity. Each team was launching an imaginary media company called the Island Post. The firm's financial health was indicated by squiggly lines in the middle of the screen. "We're firing people," David Purdy, an ex-mortgage broker, said, explaining his team's strategy. "Misery loves company." Nearby, Tim Hutchinson, a former trader at the American Stock Exchange, was watching his company die, losing market share to a virtual competitor. "Their features are blowing us out of the water!" he said. "They're blasting us." The first time around, all the teams failed. (The simulation, Trimble acknowledged, is very hard to beat.)

At lunchtime, the students talked about their old jobs ("Remember when it was eleven-thirty in the morning, and you'd say, 'I haven't gone to the bathroom yet?' ") and new ventures. Kevin Stocklin, who used to structure C.D.O.s, had been working on a documentary called "We All Fall Down: The American Mortgage Crisis," and he said he hoped one day to make "dark comedies, like the Coen brothers." A blond guy in a windbreaker said, "When I left U.B.S., I started trying to build a T-shirt business, but there was a lack of demand."

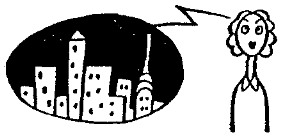
Someone else said, "You have to have a gimmick."

Jacqueline Maduneme, a tall woman with gray eyes, said that she had been laid off from the risk-management department at Citigroup. Before that, she'd thought about modelling. "When I was moving to New York, a lot of people told me, 'Go get a modelling portfolio! You have the presence.' " She went on, "I wonder what would have happened if I had done it."

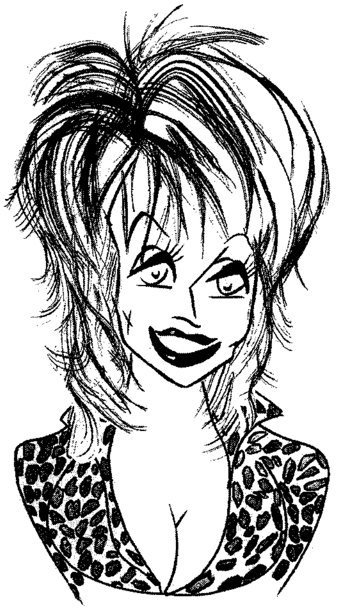
Andrew Lee, a onetime hedge-fund manager, said she should go for it: "What could you be afraid of? The worst has already happened."

—*Lizzie Widdicombe*

TRANSIENTS LOOKING SWELL



Dolly Parton, whose father paid the doctor who delivered her with a sack of cornmeal, came to New York City for the first time in 1964, on a trip with the senior class of Sevier County High School. She stayed in a hotel (a first) and rode the subway (a first, and only). In Flushing Meadows, the World's Fair was on, and "Hello, Dolly!," Parton recalled recently, was "hot, hot, hot" on Broadway. "It was all over the cabs, and the signs, and I said, 'They must have been waitin' for me!' " The second time Parton came to New York, in 1970, she and her best friend, Judy Ogle, figured they'd get a similarly warm reception. "We came here and we stayed down on, what is it, Forty-second Street, where all the whores run?" Parton said. "We went out walking, and we saw there were all these porno movies, and we were thinking, Oh, my God, this don't look like a good place. And we were overdressed—lookin' like I do now, we did look like trash, and so we looked the part." One man pushed Parton up against a wall. "He kept trying to put the make on me, and I said, 'If you touch me one more time, I swear to God I'm going to shoot you!' " Parton actually had a gun. "But no, I don't still carry one. They'll be all over my ass with that one. Now I have bodyguards!" When she and Ogle got back to the hotel, their room was locked and their luggage was in the lobby. "We just went to the airport," Parton said. "We swore we'd never come back to New York." There's a line in the new musical "9 to 5," for which Parton wrote the music and the lyrics, that she wishes she'd thought of at the time, where a secretary says to her boss, "I'll change you from a rooster to a hen with one shot!"



Dolly Parton

Parton was back in New York last week, sitting in a red velvet seat in an empty theatre—the Marquis, where "9 to 5," based on the 1980 movie of the same name, in which Parton starred, with Lily Tomlin and Jane Fonda, opens on Thursday. Parton was as uplifting, and as uplifted, as ever: icepick boots, blond wig in a mussed, half-up style. Her top was a leopard-print number (mesh inserts, turquoise spots, plunging zip), bought off the rack but "Dollyized," she said, with rhinestones and black fringe. A security guard had joked with Parton as she walked backstage that he might have to search her.

"He wants to frisk me? Well, all right!" Parton had replied.

If she had not succeeded at music, Parton said, she would have been a missionary or a cosmetologist. "Tammy Wynette, she was a beautician back home, kept her license up to date every year, even though she became one of the big stars in the whole world," Parton said. "I used to always beg her, 'Can I have your card number so I can go buy stuff at the beauty-supply houses?' " When Wynette was dying, Parton would go to the hospital and put makeup on her and fix her hair. As she talked, her fingers fanned and dipped like hummingbirds with long, red acrylic proboscises.

It was Administrative Professionals Day, which used to be called Secretaries Day. "We got a better title," Parton said. "Now, if we can just get that money up!" Parton had sent a bouquet to her assistant, whom she used to drive crazy by leaving tin cans all over the place, to drink from. "They just seem to keep things colder," she said. When Parton first moved to Nashville, she answered the phone at a sign company owned by a man whose mother lived in her apartment building. "I would just say, 'Hello, Northern Outdoor Sign!' " she recalled. "I kept hanging up on people because I didn't know how to work the phone." At Couser's, a meat-and-three, she refilled the salt and pepper shakers and the ketchup bottles in exchange for food.

For a time, in the eighties, Parton shared an apartment in New York with her former manager, Sandy Gallin. ("He's gay—he had one end of the house and I had the other. We were like Will and Grace.") Now she has her own place, on York Avenue ("It's on a high floor, and I get a little leery"), but often she prefers to sleep on her tour bus (parked in Newark), which is equipped with a mirrored wig closet and a refrigerator filled with homemade meatloaf and mashed potatoes. Parton's long shifts at the theatre have prevented her from getting out much, but, that afternoon, she'd been to a lunch at Michael's, where she ran into Les Moonves, an old acquaintance. "Some guys look better as they get older. He's one of 'em," she said. "I thought, Wow, he's still so handsome." In recent years, she has also got to know Mayor Bloomberg—"a very nice man"—a little bit. "In fact, I guess Shania Twain, one of our country stars, he called her 'Shenowia,' or something," Parton recalled. "He said to me, 'I felt so bad saying your girl's name wrong,' and I said, 'That's O.K., Mr. Bloomingdale.' "

Dolly, never go away again.

—*Lauren Collins*

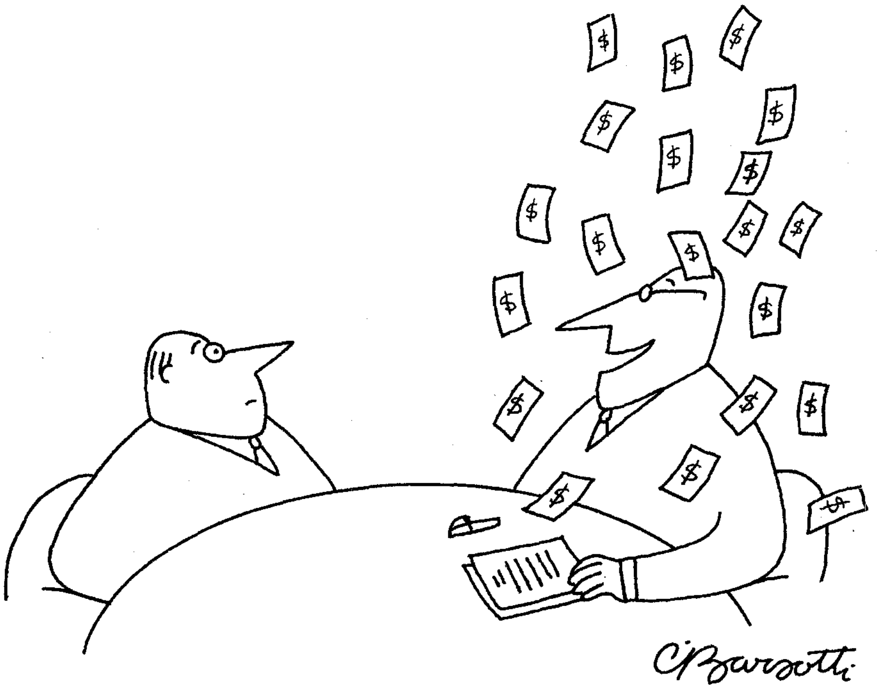
CITY ISLAND POSTCARD AT SEA

Shortly before nine o'clock on the evening of July 13, 2007, a fire broke out on the front porch of the City Island Nautical Museum. The fire was most likely set by local teen-agers, for whom the porch was a favorite hangout. "We think they were setting off firecrackers inside a rotten column," Barbara Burn Dolensek, a trustee of the museum, said recently. Backup firefighters had trouble negotiating the traffic on City Island Bridge, which has connected the island to the rest of the Bronx since 1873, and by the time they got the fire out the museum's façade was deeply charred, and smoke and water had damaged several exhibits. The museum was closed for repairs for almost a year and a half. It reopened in mid-December, thanks, in part, to a thirteen-hundred-dollar gift from the fourth graders at P.S. 175, a few blocks away, who were determined not to endure a second academic year without a full complement of field trips.

City Island, which is at the western end of Long Island Sound, just south of Pelham Bay Park, looks like the illegitimate child of Nantucket and Hunts Point Avenue. It contains what is probably the city's densest concentration of yacht clubs (six of them) and seafood restaurants (Johnny's Reef, Tony's Pier, Sammy's Fish Box, Sammy's Shrimp Box), yet the restaurants' parking lots tend to be enclosed by tall, barbed-wired-topped chain-link fences, and knowledgeable seafood-loving locals often order lamb chops or steak. The Nautical Museum is on Fordham Street, in a nineteenth-century building that used to be a public school. It's a few doors up from the tiny ferry that runs between City Island and Hart Island, a half mile to the east. Hart Island served as a prisoner-of-war camp toward the end of the Civil War and currently contains a vast city-owned cemetery, a potter's field, which is used for the interment of stillborn infants, unclaimed and indigent people of all ages, and amputated limbs. The deceased—among them the novelist Dawn Powell, who died penniless, in 1965—are buried in long trenches, in stacked pine boxes. The burials are conducted by prisoners from Rikers Island, who, on their way to and from the ferry landing, travel past the museum in blue-and-white buses operated by the Department of Correction.

Many of the museum's exhibits pertain to local nautical history. Oyster farming was invented on City Island, in the eighteen-thirties, by a Connecticut shipbuilder named Orrin Fordham. Later, the island's economy was dominated by boatbuilding and sailmaking, and the museum's display cases contain many of the gizmos required to design, construct, and operate all manner of sailing vessels. (Five victorious America's Cup yachts were built on City Island.)

The president of the City Island Historical Society, which operates the museum, is Edward Sadler, whose first name is usually given as Captain. He was born on the island in 1916, in the room that is now his bedroom, in a house, on Schofield Street, that his grandfather built in 1887. He attended grade school in the building that now houses the museum, and he spent most of his working life in New York Harbor, as the captain of fireboats and as a pilot. He tried to enlist in the Navy at the outbreak of the Second World War but was turned away as indispensable to domestic maritime



"Really? You'd like to be part of this?"

security. His fireboat—a model of which is displayed in the museum—was the first to reach the S.S. Normandie, which caught fire spectacularly in 1942, after a welder's torch touched off a pile of kapok-filled life vests.

One day recently, while some repairs were under way at the museum, Captain Sadler dropped by to look things over. He had forgotten to bring his cane but had remembered to wear his Hell Gate Pilot hat, which identifies him as a member of one of the city's most élite extinct fraternities. He had many nice things to say about Ruby Dill, his kindergarten teacher in 1922, and he recalled an especially harrowing piloting assignment, which required him to bring an enormous oceangoing ship into the East River from Long Island Sound by "bending it around North Brother Island." Then he went out front to speak with Georg Grap, the museum's building contractor. Grap pointed out a freshly installed piece of mahogany trim, up near the ceiling of the rebuilt porch, and Sadler, very pleased, said, "In all my years, I've never seen work to equal this."

—*David Owen*

AT THE GALLERIES

ART ON THE GRASS

On a brilliant spring day last week in backcountry Greenwich, the art collector Peter Brant strolled into his new museum—the Brant Foundation Art Study Center—with the slightly bowlegged gait of a man who has spent a lot of time on horseback. He passed through the hall leading to the main galleries, on one wall of which hung Christopher Wool's 1992 enamel-on-aluminum work "Fuckem," in which the slogan "Fuckem if they can't take a joke" is displayed in large letters. Brant, who is sixty-two, hopes that the slogan will represent the spirit of the foundation's inaugural exhibit—a selection, primarily from his collection, that spans the past thirty years—which opens on May 10th.

"This used to be my indoor tennis court," Brant said, gesturing at the high, barnlike rafters. "Ivan Lendl practiced here." Richard Gluckman, the architect, redesigned the space as a gallery, and installed the concrete floor.

In a rear gallery, Brant was greeted by a man whose pleasant face wore a large, wide-lipped grin. It was Jeff Koons. Brant, who has been collecting Koons's work since the mid-eighties, hugged him, then winced slightly, explaining that he had torn his right rotator cuff playing polo in Palm Beach recently. Koons allowed his sunny expression to show brief concern, then he beamed even more brightly.

Koons had been working on the placement of his 1988 sculpture "Pink Panther," in which the sad-eyed cartoon feline insinuates itself around the torso of a big-breasted St. Pauli Girl-esque blonde, who is naked to the waist. "I like placing the woman facing away," Koons said, "so people will walk this way, and then they'll see—'Urination'!" He gestured toward a large Warhol on the wall, part of a series that the Master created by directing male assistants and privileged Factory visitors to pee on a canvas primed with copper-based paint.

" 'Oxidation,' " Brant said, which is the correct name of the series.

The two men walked upstairs, where they were joined by Allison Brant, Brant's twenty-eight-year-old daughter from his first marriage (he is now married to Stephanie Seymour Brant, the model), who is the foundation's director and docent. "We've already had four hundred requests to visit," she said. "Including one from a Brownie troop!"

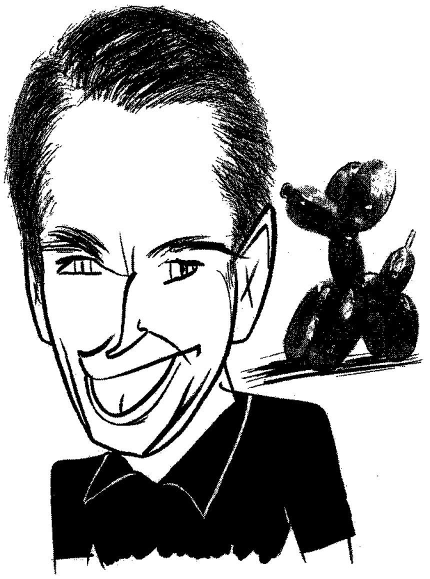
Brant and Koons stopped in front of Richard Prince's "Spiritual America," an appropriation of a Gary Gross photograph of a ten-year-old Brooke Shields, naked, standing next to a bathtub.

"It's amazing that this was so shocking when it first appeared," Brant said. "Now it doesn't seem shocking at all."

But what if one of the Brownies—or her parents—freaks out at "Pink Panther," or "Oxidation," or "Spiritual America"? (And what, for that matter, will Muffy's mother make of Paul McCarthy's twenty-foot-tall "Santa," which will be installed outside, and which portrays St. Nick holding up an enormous butt plug?) "We send all the schools a waiver telling them that there is nudity and profanity in the show," Brant said. "Now, whether they tell all the parents, I don't know."

"They're ready for you!" came a call from outside.

The foundation sits beside the Greenwich Polo Fields, a vast expanse of greenery that Brant owns. "Balloon Dog (Orange)," Koons's ten-foot chromium stainless-steel replica of the twist-ups that kids get at birthday parties—the knots and puckerings have been exquisitely rendered in steel, and the burnt-candy-orange finish makes the metal look like an elastic membrane—was being installed in a large grassy plaza where the polo players used to gather after a match.



Jeff Koons

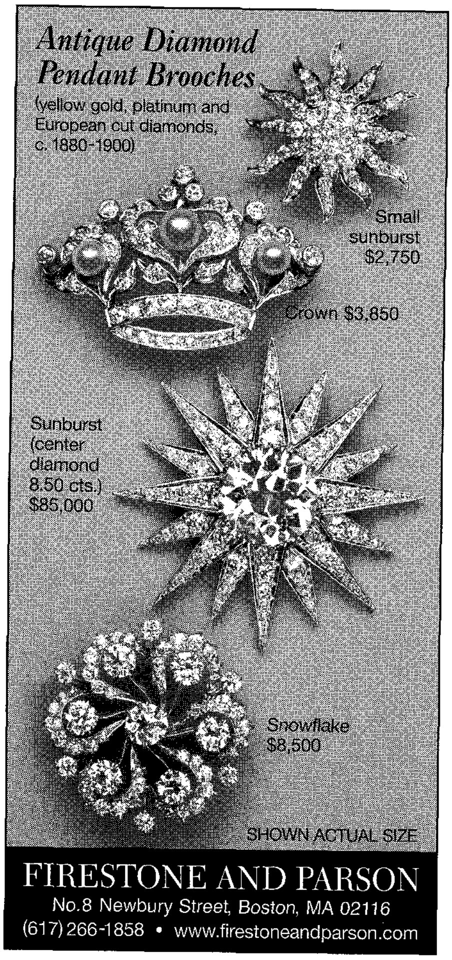
"It's about inhaling," Koons said, walking around the dog, "and inflating when you inhale. It's about life." He expanded his chest and beamed again. Then he busied himself with final details. He asked the crew to move the dog an inch and a half forward, because it looked "bolder" that way. There was something ritualistic about his ministrations: the art star planting the standard of the avant-garde in a stronghold of the old bourgeoisie.

Brant looked on, shaking his head in amusement. He said, "An inch and a half forward? Come on. When Jeff gets like this, I stay out of it."

When Koons was finished, he posed for a picture with one of the installers, and then he was gone, although his smile seemed to remain, like the Cheshire Cat's. Brant took a final look at the balloon dog before going back into the museum.

"It looks good," he said, raising his right arm to frame the vista, then grabbing his shoulder in pain.

—*John Seabrook*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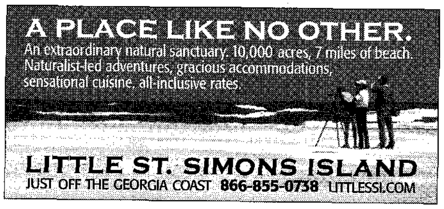
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THE SPORTING SCENE

HORSE SENSE

Can racing redeem itself?

BY PETER J. BOYER

In the spring of 2006, Rick Porter, the owner of a small but promising stable of racehorses, set out to find a new trainer for his thoroughbreds. Porter, a prosperous Delaware car dealer with Kentucky Derby ambitions, interviewed candidates at racetracks in New York and Maryland before turning his search to Delaware Park, his home track. On an impulse, he stopped at a barn marked by a small sign that read, “Larry Jones Racing Stables.” Porter had never met Jones, and he didn’t know much about him, except that Jones seemed to saddle a lot of winning horses.

Jones was racing at another track that day, but Porter poked around the barn. As he talked to the people who worked there—the assistant trainers, exercise riders, grooms, and other stable hands—he learned that many had been with Jones for some time. Racing is a migratory business, of impermanent professional relationships; Jones’s crew seemed inclined to pick up and move whenever the boss did. They answered all of Porter’s questions, speaking of Jones in almost reverent tones. Porter remembered that he’d once asked his former trainer about Jones, and had got the reply “He’s a hell of a horseman,” the highest possible praise.

“When I finally got to meet Larry, I’m not quite sure exactly what it was that I really liked about him,” Porter recalls now. “He just had a different air about him.”

Jones presented a memorable, if not particularly imposing, figure—about six feet tall, with skinny bowlegs, and a crooked smile planted beneath a big white Stetson. The encounter was like none that Porter had ever experienced with a horseman. Jones outlined an approach to training that might be described (though certainly not by Jones) as holistic. He said that he liked to climb up on the horses himself for morning gallops, because it kept him in better touch with the animals. He created a unique feeding program, reflected not only in the special mix he fed the horses (which he kept secret) but in the way he fed them. In most stalls, hayracks are installed in a corner at head level. Jones believed that horses should eat as nature intended, by grazing, allowing the nasal passages to drain; in his stalls, the feed is spread over the floor.

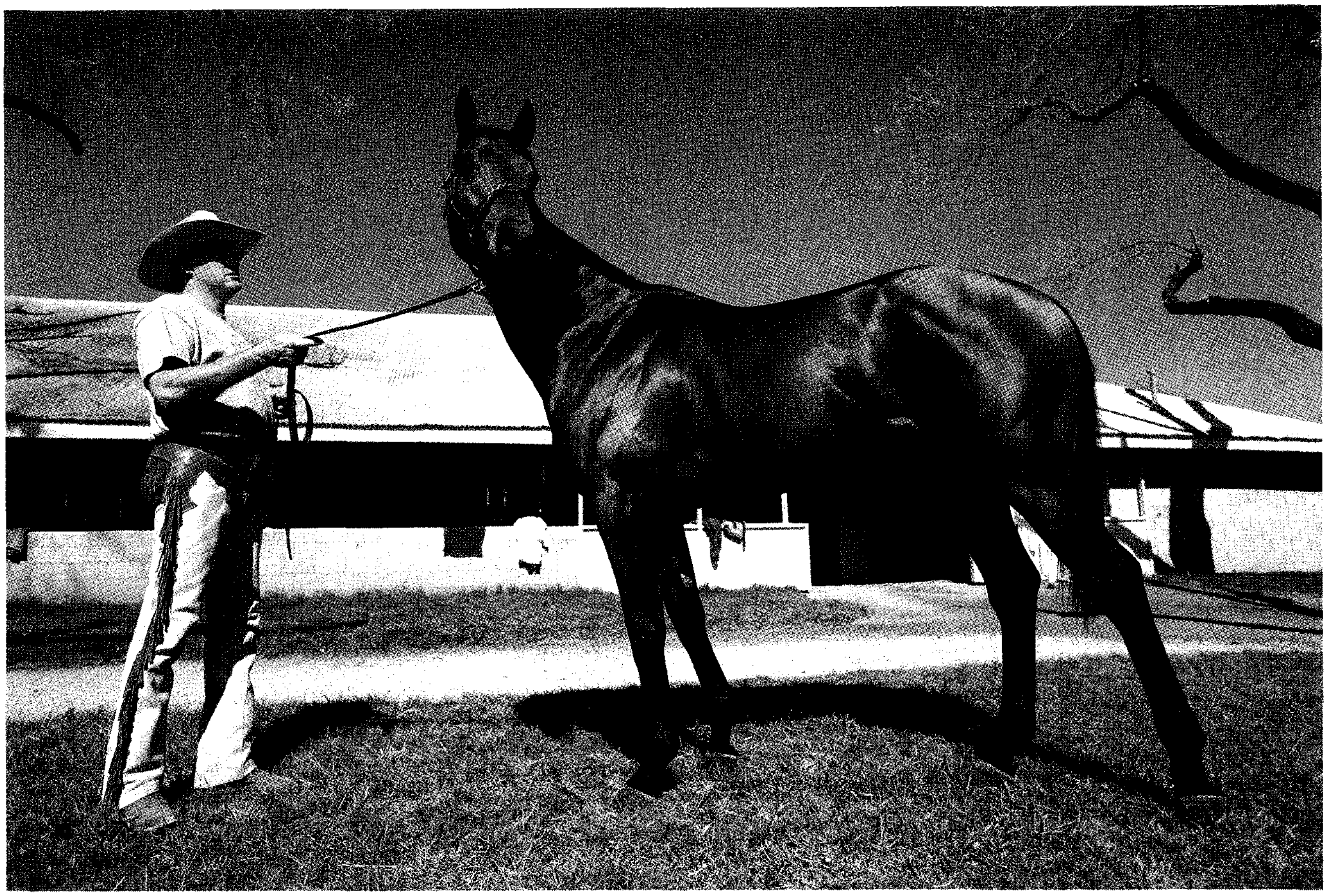
“I liked everything he said about the way he trained,” Porter says. “I liked what he said about his feeding program, and I liked his medication philosophy.” The issue of medicating horses has been a chronic source of controversy for the horse-racing industry. Horses, like all animals, occasionally need medication; some of those routinely administered to racehorses not only improve their physical well-being but also enhance their racing performances, leading to overuse. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that racing is governed by various state authorities, enforcing different rules to greater or lesser degree, rather than by a single, national governing body that has a clear set of rules and the power to discipline violators.

Debate over the use of medication has occasionally spilled over into a broader public discussion about the humaneness of the sport. Porter’s meeting with Jones took place during one of those moments. The running of the Preakness Stakes, outside Baltimore, the second leg of racing’s Triple Crown series, had occurred on the weekend that Porter first visited Jones’s barn. In that race, Barbaro, the Kentucky Derby winner, pulled up lame, with multiple fractures in his right hind leg, injuries that eventually proved fatal. The disturbing incident, seen by millions of casual fans drawn to television coverage of the race by Barbaro’s Triple Crown prospects, brought unwelcome scrutiny to the sport. Critics insisted that racehorses were overmedicated and over-bred, and exposed too early to track surfaces that caused injuries. Reforms were discussed but, for the most part, never implemented.

Jones didn't like to medicate his horses, and he refused to administer anabolic steroids, even though they were legal in most racing jurisdictions. Many trainers routinely inject their horses with hyaluronic acid, an organic substance that has the effect of loosening stiff joints. Jones didn't inject, preferring the less invasive method of oral application. Unlike many of his fellow-horsemen, he didn't object to the trend toward softer artificial surfaces on racetracks, to reduce injury, and he believed that the sport needed a national governing body with enforcement power.

After Jones became the principal trainer of Porter's Fox Hill Farm stable, Porter saw what Jones had meant by being a hands-on trainer. Horses are born to run, but not necessarily while carrying a human being and a saddle on their backs; in training and racing, their muscles get strained, and their joints get stiff, which is why substances like hyaluronic acid are so commonly used. Porter soon learned why Jones didn't like to inject his animals. Jones introduced him to a man named Bill Schmidt, who, Jones said, played a key role in his training regimen. Schmidt was Jones's personal chiropractor, and, at Jones's urging, he had been treating horses for nearly twenty years. Over time, Jones had himself learned the basics of chiropractic manipulation, and applied the technique to his animals. "Almost every day, Larry checks the alignment on his horses," Porter says. "He goes down the spine, and feels one vertebra at a time." When there is a problem with a horse's ankle joints, Porter added, "he can manipulate them, pop them back into place when they get out of joint."

When Porter hired Jones, in 2006, he had a very good horse in training as a two-year-old, who was winning his juvenile races in a manner that suggested Kentucky Derby potential. His name was Hard Spun, a son of the great sire Danzig, and his entry in the 2007 Derby was a first for Jones. Hard Spun took the lead soon after breaking from the gate, and led the pack of twenty horses through the final turn and into the stretch run, before being passed in the final strides by the eventual winner, Street Sense. It was an exhilarating showing for the new team, and Porter came away with a touch of Derby fever. He was soon talking to Jones about the prospects of another young horse in his barn for the 2008 Derby, a fleet gray filly called Eight Belles.


The trainer Larry Jones with Friesan Fire, one of the favorites to win the Kentucky Derby. Photograph by Benjamin Lowy.

When it is time for Jones to mount up for a morning gallop, a stable hand appears with a white plastic feed bucket and places it, upside down, next to the horse. Jones, wearing tan chaps with orange fringe, uses the bucket as a stepladder, and as he swings his leg over his mount you can almost hear his bones creaking. Jones is fifty-two, and looks every bit of it. I watched him work a few of his horses just after dawn recently, at Oaklawn Park, in Arkansas. When he returned to the stable, I asked him why he still does it. "That's the only way I know how to do it," he said. "I feel like I lose contact with my horses if I can't be around 'em, and ride 'em at least two or three days a week myself. And that's what I enjoy doing. That's what got me into this sport. I enjoy working with the horses."

It is an approach best suited to a small-time trainer with a modest string of horses, which, until recently, is what Larry Jones was. He's now among that rank of horsemen whose mobile-phone numbers are programmed into the iPhones of ESPN producers, but five years ago his fame existed mostly among horseplayers betting ten-thousand-dollar claiming races at such tracks as Prairie Meadows, in Altoona, Iowa. On the lower-tier racing circuit, Jones was known as a trainer who could coax overachievement out of cheap horses, an ability he has credited to his upbringing. Jones's parents were Kentucky farmers who kept some cattle and used horses to work the farm. "Horses come second nature to me," he says. "For fifty years, I've been with 'em and ridin' 'em, and they're part of my everyday life. Teaching 'em to run really isn't that hard, 'cause these things are bred to run. It's just taking care of 'em, and learning how to understand 'em, and them telling you what they need and what they don't need."

Jones tried farming himself for a time, but in 1980 he took an eight-hundred-dollar plunge and bought a racehorse called Ala Turf—who won the only time he raced for his owner. Jones got a training license, and eventually other horse owners began to bring their animals to him.

At first, Jones mimicked the routines of other trainers. He'd show up at morning workouts with a stopwatch in his hand, clocking his horses as they breezed by. "I was out there one morning, and I'm watching my clock, and this old-timer was with me. He was helping me, and I was telling him the splits," Jones recalled. "And he said, 'Where'd your horse switch leads at, comin' down the lane?' I said, 'I don't know, I was watchin' my watch.' He said, 'Son, let me tell you, if you need that watch to tell you what kinda horse you got, you don't need the horse. Watch your horse, leave the watch alone, and you'll learn to see what they're doing.' And from then on I just kinda threw it away and watched to see how they finish. And I can get within a tick or two now of what they worked, just by watching, and knowing. I don't even bring a stopwatch."

Jones became the most intuitive of trainers, which proved a useful trait when he accompanied owners to the yearling sales hoping to find young horses who might develop into winners. Jones would show up at the sales with a stethoscope, joking that he was listening for one of the horses to whisper "Buy me." One of his recommended purchases was a filly called Don't Countess Out, who was bought for sixteen thousand dollars and went on to earn $378,951. Another filly, Josh's Madelyn, was bought for ten thousand, and won $480,309 in twenty-seven starts for Jones.

Jones says that his success with female horses was really just a function of economics—fillies are cheaper than colts. "A lot of my owners didn't have a lot of money to lose in the game," he says. "They had the money to kinda get in and all, and they didn't really have to make money, but they didn't really want to be up there losing a lot. So I always recommended the fillies as being safer, because we were trying to buy fillies whose pedigree was worth almost as much as what we were giving for 'em. I was buying what I thought were the right horses, horses that had potential but also had ways to recoup our money, if we needed to. That left me with the only thing in the barn being fillies. At one time, if I had twenty-five horses in the barn twenty of 'em would be fillies and five of 'em boys. And what you win races with is what you get started with."

"How often have you asked yourselves, 'Who would pay the ransom if I were kidnapped by terrorists?'"

It was a filly, Island Sand, that finally brought Jones to racing's upper tier, with a victory in the 2004 Acorn Stakes at Belmont. It was Jones's first win in a Grade 1 stakes race—those hundred or so races designated by the Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association as the sport's most important, attracting the best talent. The following year, Island Sand won the million-dollar Delaware Handicap; soon afterward, Jones shifted his operations to Delaware Park. His success there brought him to the attention of Rick Porter, who had Jones at his side in the autumn of 2006, when he bought Eight Belles as a yearling.

"We always thought this filly was a little special," Jones says. "When we bought her, we looked forward to her getting in the barn six months later. And she came in, and we were very excited about her." Once Jones started riding her, he learned that Eight Belles was not an especially precocious filly. "She had legs going everywhere, she'd switch leads, would switch in the front but forget to switch in the back," he says. "You know, on those you've just got to give 'em time."

Racing as a juvenile in 2007, Eight Belles started off slowly, winning only once in five starts. Porter was growing concerned. "But I told Rick, 'This is your next star,'" Jones says. "'You've just got to give her time, but believe me, she's special.' Finally, she started getting it right, she figured it out. Plus, we were figuring *her* out. It's like taking an eighth-grade kid that looks to be pretty good at basketball, but he's liable to be going in for a fast break and trip over his own feet and fall on his face before he gets there. You just gotta understand who's got the talent, who needs to wait, who's still gonna grow a lot."

The horse came into her own when she began racing as a three-year-old, the age at which horses compete in the Triple Crown races. In the early months of 2008, she won all four of her races, qualifying for the Kentucky Derby, which posed a dilemma for Porter and Jones. Fillies, even the best of them, don't usually compete in the Triple Crown events, for the same reason that high-school girls don't usually play on the boys' football team. Of the thousands of horses that had run in the Derby in its hundred-and-thirty-three-year history, only thirty-eight were fillies, and only three of them had won—the last being Winning Colors, in 1988.

Derby Week arrived, and the decision about Eight Belles had still not been made. The filly was at Churchill Downs, because Porter had also entered her in the Kentucky Oaks, considered the premier race for fillies, which is run the day before the Derby—and in which Eight Belles probably would have been the favorite to win. Porter effectively decided the matter by drawing straws, saying that if Eight Belles drew a bad Derby post position—on the far outside, or on the rail, where she might have difficulty getting ahead of the pack—he would run her in the Oaks. The horse drew an ideal spot, the No. 5 gate, and she was in the Derby.

Jones would have been happy to run Eight Belles in the Oaks (another Jones horse, Proud Spell, won), but he wasn't overawed by the colts he saw in the Derby field, not even by the supposed super-horse, Big Brown.

The favored colt was a great but flawed horse—flawed by nature, in that he had injury-prone feet (which eventually ended his racing career), and flawed by luck, in that he ended up in the hands of folks who were, as the media politely termed it, "brash." Big Brown's connections—the sport's term for the humans involved with a racehorse—were like characters from a Damon Runyon story, without the charm. His first owner was a Brooklyn trucking operator, who had named the horse for U.P.S. after the firm renewed his company's contract. He sold majority interest in the horse to Michael Iavarone, a self-described "investment banker," who in the nineties had been fined, censured, and suspended by the National Association of Securities Dealers for making unauthorized trades. One firm that Iavarone had worked for was shut down by regulators and pleaded guilty to felony enterprise corruption. He'd had a lien filed against him by the I.R.S., and there was a judgment against him in Kentucky for failing to pay for horses he'd bought. Iavarone had ultimately paid the debts, but he neglected to mention these features of his past when he tried to attract investors to a hundred-million-dollar racehorse hedge fund, with Big Brown as a come-on.

Big Brown's trainer, Rick Dutrow, was another figure whom many in racing found easy to cheer against. A former drug abuser who had once been reduced to living in a barn, Dutrow had been cited several times for violations in administering medications to his horses. The racing world, a tolerant culture, might have overlooked those shortcomings, but Dutrow had shown bad form when he talked up his colt's chances by disparaging other contenders and their connections.

Going into the race, the press played up the novelty angle ("There will be girl power in the 134th Kentucky Derby," the A.P.'s racing writer, Beth Harris, wrote), and Presidential candidate Hillary Clinton placed a bet on Eight Belles through her daughter, Chelsea, who was at the race.

Eight Belles, a thirteen-to-one long shot, would have been a storybook foil for Big Brown, and for much of the race it seemed that there might even be a fantasy ending. She broke cleanly out of the gate, and, under the hand of the jockey, Gabriel Saez, a twenty-year-old Panamanian, she was positioned to make a big move at the head of the home stretch. Big Brown had just swooped into the

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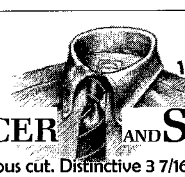

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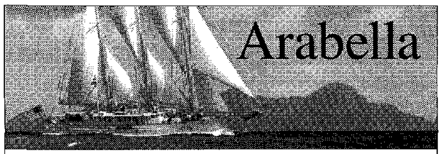

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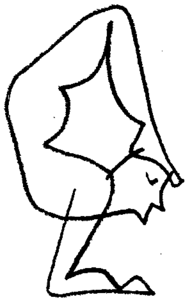
lead on the outside, and was pulling away, when Eight Belles made her charge. "Big Brown has opened up now by three," the track announcer, Luke Kruytbosch, said. Then, as if astonished by what he was seeing, Kruytbosch shouted, "The game filly, Eight Belles, is trying to run him down the final furlong!" In the end, Eight Belles didn't have enough to catch Big Brown, who beat her by nearly five lengths.

After passing the wire, Saez stood up in the stirrups to slow Eight Belles down, and he thought he felt something odd in her gallop. Later, he said that he'd heard something pop, and was trying to pull her up—stop her—when, a quarter mile past the finish line, her front legs buckled and she fell to the track, her forelegs folded beneath her. Saez, who had been thrown, got up and rushed to her side, along with a track steward and a veterinarian.

Up in the owners' box, Rick Porter and his family were celebrating. Their view of the incident had been blocked by the track's huge tote board, which showed the horses' betting odds and payouts. Nearby, Jones was joking with Steve Asmussen, a fellow-trainer, as they made their way down to the paddock area to unsaddle their horses. As they neared the track, Jones saw his blacksmith, who told him that he'd heard a horse was down on the track. Jones had just seen Eight Belles gallop past, looking fine, and he assumed that the injured horse was one of the late finishers. Then he saw his jockey, Saez, riding toward him on a lead pony.



"What's the matter?" Jones asked.

"They're putting her down," Saez told him.

Jones's first reaction was anger. It is customary to consult with an injured horse's trainer before administering treatment, and if Eight Belles had already been euthanized Jones wanted to know why. He ran to the two equine ambulances at the back of the track. When he got next to his horse, and touched her, moving her legs, he could see that the decision made on the track had been the right one. Eight Belles had suffered compound fractures to both of her front ankles. "She had no chance," he says now. "As soon as I looked, and moved her legs just a little bit, there was no way you're gonna save this horse. You've gotta have at least three legs to stand on, and she didn't have 'em. She just didn't have 'em."

The next day, the New York *Times* published an article that asked, "Why isn't there more pressure to put the sport of kings under the umbrella of animal cruelty?" Horse racing, the article contended, is "only a couple of steps removed from animal fighting."

The racing industry found itself under assault from columnists, bloggers, politicians, and, especially, animal-rights activists. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals released a letter to Hillary Clinton, accusing her of culpability in Eight Belles's death for having wagered on the horse. "If we suddenly make it kind of tainted, it will not be really the place where you want to be seen," PETA's president, Ingrid Newkirk, explained. "We want other politicians, other people, not to wish to be associated with it." The organization called for the suspension of Eight Belles's jockey, Saez (who "whipped her mercilessly"), and demanded that Louisville's prosecutor file criminal charges against Jones (he declined to do so). Congress scheduled a hearing on the safety hazards posed to horses in racing. Some commentators questioned the wisdom of running a filly against the stronger colts, and there was speculation that Jones must have administered steroids to Eight Belles. "Here's a filly that was as large as the boys, and she was accused of being that big only because of steroids," says Jones. "And we knew that we had not done it."

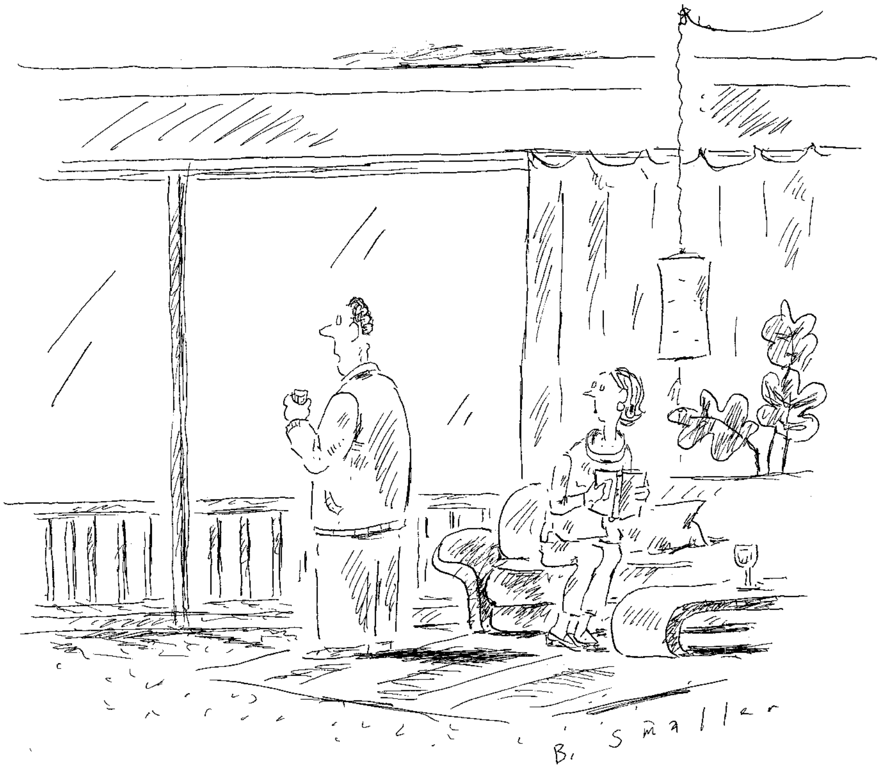
Rick Porter says that he ignored the criticism. "Larry took it more personally," he says, "because he was taking care of the horse." In the days after the race, Jones watched the video replay repeatedly, looking for any sign that Eight Belles was in trouble. "I'm questioning, Did I miss something?" he says. "I mean, I thought she was coming into the race better than she ever had, and I felt sure she was, or she couldn't have run that kind of race."

The Kentucky Horse Racing Authority ordered a necropsy of Eight Belles. Jones asked Dr. Lafe Nichols, who was at the time the Commonwealth's chief horse-racing vet, to make sure the procedure included a close examination of the skin around the horse's joints. "You can find old needle spots," Jones says. "I said, You check her everywhere, because I want a clean bill. I know none of this stuff ever happened."

The veterinarian's report confirmed that Eight Belles had suffered compound fractures at her foreleg fetlock joints—her ankles—and that there was no sign of disease, skeletal malformations, or cardiovascular failure. (It had been speculated that Eight Belles may literally have run herself to death, suffering a heart attack that caused her fall.) Two days later, Kentucky officials reported that the horse had tested negative for steroids, and for all banned substances.

The steroids controversy had an unexpected effect on Jones's regard for his competitor, Rick Dutrow. Big Brown's trainer publicly admitted that his horse had been given anabolic steroids before the Derby—steroids weren't illegal in Kentucky racing—and that he routinely administered steroids to all of his animals on a monthly basis. "In all fairness, he is the only one that stepped up to the plate and said, 'Well, I give mine steroids,'" Jones says. "I somewhat respect him for that." After Big Brown won the Preakness, Dutrow declared that his horse was far superior to the competition, and that he would win the Belmont Stakes (the third leg in the Triple Crown) even though Dutrow had stopped giving him his usual dose of steroids after the Derby. Big Brown turned in the worst performance of his career, finishing last in the Belmont—the only winner of both the Derby and the Preakness ever to do so.

Apart from the posturing and the opportunism that Eight Belles's death inspired, the incident occasioned much introspection within the industry. Thoughtful people involved in racing knew that it was a deeply troubled sport, with a shrinking fan base, a battered reputation, and one intractable problem: the horses themselves. Breeding practices, motivated by the enormous sums paid for élite bloodlines, have produced a modern thoroughbred that is structurally unsound. Every horse in the 2008 Derby field was related, descending from the



"Am I a happy man or just an asymptomatic one?"

• •

brilliant Vanderbilt horse of the early nineteen-fifties, Native Dancer—who lost only once in twenty-two starts but had to be retired because of bad ankles. His son, Raise a Native, raced only four times, never losing, before breaking down. Raise a Native's great-great-granddaughter was Eight Belles, who was also related to Raise a Native through two other ancestral lines.

"When I started, you had racing stables like Calumet Farm, Green Tree—all those people were breeding to race their own horses," Jones says. "But now it's got so where they're just breeding for the market, and they breed for whatever they think will bring the most money. And they may not put a lot of thought process into the pedigrees matching up and all. I think that's the biggest thing. They just try to breed for the highest-price horse, whether it looks like they're breeding for soundness or not."

One of Jones's breeder friends, and an ally in the call for racing reform, was Jim Squires, who occasionally wrote commentaries on the sport for the *Times*. A few days after Eight Belles's death, Squires wrote an article in which he contended that breeders needed to try to reverse the breeding trend. More immediately, he called for strict and uniform policing of all "medications that mask injuries and weaknesses."

A month later, one of Squires's horses trained by Jones, Stones River, ran at Delaware Park, and won by nearly ten lengths. Routine drug testing after the race, however, showed that Stones River had raced with illegal levels of the bronchodilator Clenbuterol. Delaware racing authorities fined Jones five hundred dollars and ordered a one-week suspension. As it happened, the alleged violation was revealed just before the start of the congressional hearing on horse racing. Squires and Jones—both of whom had spotless records on medication—vigorously protested the finding, insisting that their horse had been tampered with, in an act of vengeance because of their outspoken stance on reform.

"Other trainers got very hostile when we came out against medication so much," Jones says. "I was getting a lot of flack. The cheap horse people, with horses that probably need medication more, really wanted me to keep my mouth shut, and they had let me know that in no uncertain terms." Jones received a lot of unsigned hate mail, including one advising him, he says, that "I could take my cowboy hat, take my jockey, take my horses, and go back to Kentucky, that the East Coast did not need me." Jones had reason to believe that his barn had been violated. A year earlier, one of his horses had lagged in a race and developed respiratory problems; a veterinary exam revealed that someone had "sponged" the horse—stuffed a piece of sponge deep inside her nostrils to impede breathing.

Jones appealed the suspension, but the racing authorities, while commending Jones and Squires for their anti-drug stances, based their ruling on the tests alone, and upheld the decision. The executive director of the state's thoroughbred-racing commission, John Wayne, tried to soft-pedal the decision, noting that Clenbuterol is a therapeutic, rather than a performance-enhancing, medication, and that the incident should not tarnish Jones's reputation. Jones continues to dispute the finding.

A few weeks after that incident, Jones began to notify the owners of his horses that he would take no new two-year-olds into his stable, and that he intended to quit training at the end of the 2009 Breeders' Cup series, in November.

Jones had two very bright prospects in his barn as he began to prepare for the 2009 Triple Crown series. The better of the two, on paper, at least, is a horse called Friesan Fire, who carries horse-racing royalty in his blood. He is the son of the Hall of Fame sire A.P. Indy, a Belmont Stakes winner whose progeny are inclined to the long distances, like those in the Triple Crown. One of his grandfathers was the Triple Crown winner Seattle Slew, and he is a direct descendant—on both sides—of Secretariat, the 1973 Triple Crown winner, who is considered by some to be the best racehorse ever.

Friesan Fire's owner at Vinery Stables was so eager to have Larry Jones handle the young horse that he ended up selling half interest in the colt to Rick Porter, who acted as an intermediary in acquiring Jones's services.

Jones, too, was excited by the colt, a handsome animal with obvious potential. But Friesan Fire proved a terrible student, showing little inclination to pass other horses on the racetrack. As a two-year-old, he won only once in four races. "He was just following the other horses," Jones says. "He just absolutely didn't care if he beat them or not. He'd run up to them, and then just kind of stop and go along just for the ride. He just needed to basically grow up."

Jones's other Derby prospect was Old Fashioned, who was a half brother to Eight Belles. His breeding didn't suggest an affinity for the long distances, but Old Fashioned (another gray) was all ambition on the track. "He intended to win every time he went out there," Jones says. "Whatever you put him out with, even if it's in a morning gallop, he doesn't want somebody coming by him. We had to at least get that out of him, and get him under control, where we could sit on him and say, 'It's O.K. if some of them pass you.' But when he started hooking up, and you started letting him out, he intended to stay in front."

Old Fashioned established his front-running style as a juvenile last year, winning all four of his starts as a two-year-old. For the Derby preparatory races this year, Jones took Old Fashioned to Oaklawn, in Arkansas. His wife, and assistant trainer, Cindy, took Friesan Fire to New Orleans, to do his prepping at the Fair Grounds racetrack.

Old Fashioned won his first race as a three-year-old in February, remaining undefeated, and emerged as one of the early favorites for the Kentucky Derby. But in the Rebel Stakes, run on March 14th, Old Fashioned was caught in the stretch and passed by a fifty-six-to-one long shot called Win Willy. That made his final prep race, the Arkansas Derby, on April 11th, a critical test. "He's just going to have to muster it up, just on pure guts and determination," Jones told me that week.

Old Fashioned ran a characteristic race in the Arkansas Derby, seizing the lead quickly and staying in front until the final furlong, when he was passed by a fresh colt called Papa Clem. Jones was disappointed not to win, but he still meant to give Old Fashioned his chance at the Kentucky Derby. That afternoon, however, as Old Fashioned was returned to his stall, Jones noticed that something in the horse's gait was off. A veterinarian was summoned, and an examination found that Old Fashioned had suffered a "slab fracture"—a piece of bone had broken away in one of his forelegs.

Jones transported him to Kentucky, where he underwent surgery and was pronounced fit. Jones said that horses often come back from similar injuries and race again, but Old Fashioned will retire to stud. "He'll be one of those horses that, when you turn him out into the field, he'll run, and he'll play, and he won't know anything's the matter, because he won't be having to give a hundred and ten per cent," he said.

Friesan Fire, meanwhile, had become a new racehorse in New Orleans. He won all three of the major preparatory races at the Fair Grounds, the first horse ever to do so. He heads to the Kentucky Derby as one of the likely favorites, and will be ridden by Gabriel Saez.

For Jones, it will probably be his last such trip to Churchill Downs. The death of Eight Belles and its aftermath plainly took a toll, but the greater price may have come with Jones's sudden success in the big time. "I think the reason that Larry decided to quit is he got himself in the position of having more than a hundred horses," Rick Porter says. "He was going up to races everywhere. Owners, if he wasn't with their horse, they were upset. And he was getting sick and tired. He felt in his mind he couldn't please his owners." Jones, for his part, says, "If I'd wanted to go into business, I'd have gone to college and started a regular job, you know?"

Jones owns some broodmares, and he says that Cindy will continue to train horses—"I am probably going to just be her exercise rider"—which may prove to be his way of getting back to the small time. He says that he has loved getting to the Derby for three consecutive years. But when he talks about his greatest satisfaction in racing he recalls the story of a long-ago waif called Surprise Larry.

The colt was an unexpected twin who was nudged away by his mother. Jones took up the horse as a project, nurtured him, and trained him as a racehorse despite his apparent lack of racing ability. Jones rented a stall for the horse at the track, mainly to hold the space in case a better horse came along. Almost on a lark, he entered Surprise Larry in a race, which the horse lost, as he did in a second try, and a third. In his fourth race, he somehow put together all the elements perfectly, and won. Surprise, Larry.

"He won a race," Jones says. "And, to me, that was as much enjoyment as I have gotten out of horse racing." ♦

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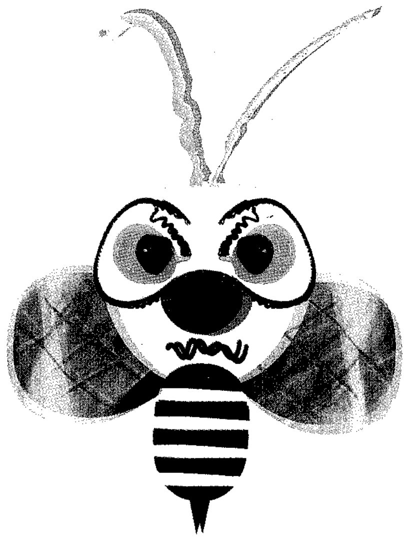
And then I hope they're allergic and they just blow up! We gotta get out of this hive, we gotta get mobile . . . "Going Mobile"! The Who was a good band. Let's go find a picnic or some sunbathers or something. . . . I'd love some coconut suntan lotion or a . . . beer. Wouldn't you love a six-pack of Stella Artois right now? That's the best beer. Stel-la! That was actually a pretty good imitation, don't you think? The guy who played him in the movie, the "Streetcar" . . . who am I thinking of? It's on the tip of my . . . Jesus, what's wrong with me I can't come up with this dude's name? . . . Or how about, how about: a coconut Stella Artois beer?! Wouldn't that be the best and you could spread it all over your body and it's U.V. 1,000 or 1,000 proof or something. God, I want to *sting* someone. . . . Oh, my God, my antennae are like supersensitive right now. . . . Don't . . . don't touch . . . I said *don't!* It's O.K., it's cool, it's cool. You see that little bee . . . you see that little drone? *Trigona minima! Amo, amas, amat.* Let's go over and beat the living crap out of him. I don't know why, but I just *hate* him right now. He's so small and smug. . . . Look at that bee . . . just look at him. . . . Oh, my God, there's a picnic. Let's totally go there right now. . . . I think this fat kid's allergic . . . I'm so going to sting him! Oh, my God, he's totally swatting me . . . did you see that dude's face! Fucking hilarious. He was all, like, "It's a bee, it's a bee!" And his mom was all, like, "Don't aggravate him!" Aggravate him is *right!* I'll go ballistic on you, tubby! Marlon Brando! Stel-la! Got it. I'm on fire. Let's do another line. I don't know, behind that hibiscus, I don't give a fuck. What do you mean, I did the last of it? I just need a bump. We should totally fly downtown, score some more blow, and get back here before the picnic breaks up and then do more coke. God, I'd kill for a cigarette. I'm gonna start smoking, I know, I know, but I look so fucking debonair when I do it. I wish we had some tunes. Early Van Halen or . . . you know what would be perfect right now? The Smiths. I'm serious. "Girlfriend in a coma, I know, I know, it's serious." There's that yellow jacket, Devin, by the potato salad. Do you think he's got any blow? He's a great guy, just a really great laid-back kinda no-cares-in-the-world but totally together guy and very funny but easygoing and totally disarming and I think he'd really appreciate our sort of world view and be a nice addition to our hive. . . . I'm totally fucking with you! He's a total prick. Let's kick the shit out of him and steal his coke. There's that fat kid again. I'm going to sting this whole family! "Aah!" They're running! I'm buzzing, I'm buzzing, I'm buzzing, this is incredible. I'm in the car! I'm in the car. I'm in the *car!* Everyone's screaming and flailing and . . . this is lame, get me out. . . . I'll fly out this window and . . . Ow! Wait a minute, and . . . Ow! Ow! Ow! What the fuck? It's like a . . . ow! . . . clear force field. . . . Whoa, I just totally accidentally stung the mother. . . . Sorry, but you're like moving so much and this force field is killing me. . . . Ow. . . . Oh, wait, the force field is rolling down and . . . Ahh! Did you see me? I was totally in a moving car. So crazy. Wait, wait, head rush. I'm woozy. I gotta sit, I gotta . . . Where's a pistil or a stamen when you need one? . . . This spilled soda will do for the moment. . . . Wait, slow down, slow down, slow down. . . . My heart is racing . . . gotta relax . . . gotta . . . say something soothing . . . I don't know . . . talk about honey or strawberry jam. . . . I'm gonna die, I'm gonna die. . . . Where'd you get this shit? I think it's laced with insecticide or something. . . . My heart is going like a mile a millisecond. It's going to burst through my thorax and all over the jacarandas. Ha! Stop making me laugh, stop it, stop it, I got pollen coming out of my nose. I need to sit down . . . I need . . . I can't do this again . . . this is the last time, really . . . no, I mean it. . . . From now on, nothing stronger than honey. Jesus, the sun's going down, where'd the day go, you wanna get dinner, I'm not getting any sleep tonight. ♦



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Do new cystic-fibrosis therapies hold the key to treating other genetic disorders?

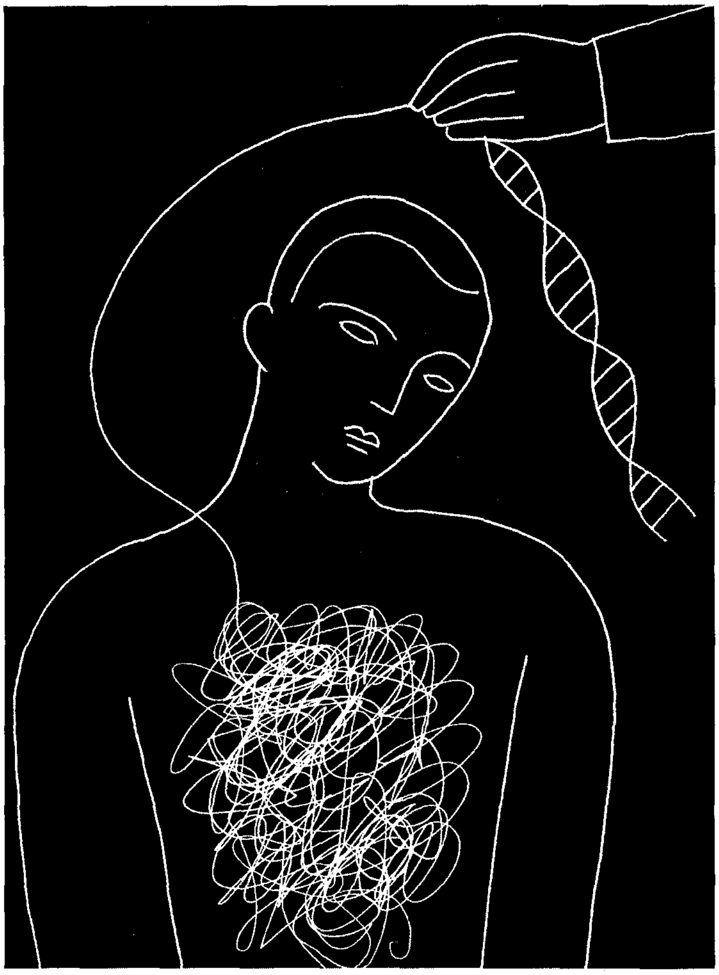
BY JEROME GROOPMAN

When Chrissy Falletti was born, in 1975, she seemed healthy, but soon her father, a physician in Youngstown, Ohio, and her mother, a nurse, observed that she was losing weight. At six weeks old, Falletti was admitted to Rainbow Babies & Children's Hospital, in Cleveland. As part of her evaluation, she underwent a sweat test—electrodes were strapped to her forearms, and her perspiration was collected on a thin paper filter. The test showed abnormally elevated amounts of chloride, a component of the salt in sweat, which indicated a diagnosis of cystic fibrosis. Falletti's mother quit her job to oversee her care. "No one in my family had cystic fibrosis, but my parents knew what to expect," Falletti, now thirty-three, told me when we spoke by phone recently. "Parents want to fix everything. As a doctor and a nurse, they are trained to fix people. They tried to keep positive, but they had a child who couldn't be fixed."

Cystic fibrosis is the most common fatal genetic disorder in North America among Caucasians; some thirty thousand Americans have the disease, and about ten million Americans are silent carriers of the defective cystic-fibrosis gene. The normal gene produces a protein called CFTR, which channels chloride ions out of the cells that line the body's cavities and surfaces. When the gene is mutated, the chloride ions cannot be moved, and regular body secretions become thick and congested. As the gastrointestinal tract and the pancreas become blocked, the absorption of fats and certain vitamins slows, starving the body of essential nutrients. (Sometimes the intestine must be opened surgically to remove a large blockage and help restore digestion.) In the lungs, the trachea, and the sinuses, the mucus becomes as thick as overcooked oatmeal, and the caked mucus provides a fertile field for bacterial growth. The mucus also impairs the function of the cilia, the fine hairlike projections on cells that are crucial to cleaning the airways. On average, people with cystic fibrosis lose two per cent of their lung function each year. Although antibiotics and pancreatic enzymes (which improve fat and vitamin absorption) have helped extend the average life span of patients into their late thirties, cystic fibrosis remains a uniformly fatal disease, with death often occurring as a result of pneumonia or respiratory failure.

Since childhood, Falletti has had a daily regimen that includes more than fifteen medicines and treatments. "Many days are exhausting," she said. Twice a day, she uses an apparatus that resembles a life vest; hoses inflate the vest at specified frequencies and pressures to vibrate the chest wall and mobilize the mucus. At night, she does postural draining, a sequence of twelve inverted positions during which a partner claps her upper back, her sides, and the front of her chest in order to loosen the mucus. "It takes about three hours out of my day just to clear my airway," Falletti explained. Even so, she has led an active life; until she was sixteen, she competed in gymnastics at state and national levels. A first-grade teacher now and married to an optician, she is keenly aware that she is approaching the age at which most people with the disorder die. She has suffered repeated bouts of pneumonia and a near-fatal collapse of one lung, which required emergency care, and she struggles to maintain a healthy weight. By 2007, her lung function had fallen to as low as fifty per cent of normal. "Because my lung function is so low, I am told that I shouldn't have children, which makes me really sad, because my husband doesn't have the gene and we really wanted kids," Falletti said. Two of her close friends, also cystic-fibrosis patients, have died; so has a fellow sufferer and teacher from a nearby town, whose achievements she admired. "That really hit home," she said. "It is heartbreaking to imagine my husband by himself."

Last year, Chrissy was among a group of patients with cystic fibrosis who took part in a study of an experimental oral drug, produced by Vertex Pharmaceuticals, that is designed to restore function to the abnormal protein and permit the movement of chloride. "On the Vertex study, I just felt completely different," Falletti said. "My sister said she used to know when I entered church because she could hear my cough. Then, when I was on the study, my nephew told me, 'I can't tell when you come in anymore.'" Within two weeks, her lung function had improved from a baseline of about fifty per cent to just over sixty per cent. She gained almost ten pounds, and after twenty-eight days her lung function had increased by eighteen per cent over all. The clinical trial ended, and all patients came off the therapy. Within a week, Chrissy's lung function had begun to decline. "I call the cystic-fibrosis center all the time, asking, 'Do you have any news?'" she said. "When you've finally felt what normal feels like, you kind of realize it's not that much fun being your abnormal self."



Some drugs seem to restore a mutated protein to its normal function.

ANTHONY RUSSO

Last October, at the North American Cystic Fibrosis Conference, held in Orlando, Florida, Dr. Frank Accurso, of the Children's Hospital in Aurora, Colorado, presented the results of the first two parts of the Vertex trial, which was placebo-controlled. (I served on a scientific-advisory board at Vertex from 1991 to 2000. I have no current connection to or financial interest in the company.) Of the nineteen patients who participated in the second part of the study, those who received a specific dose of the drug demonstrated a renewed ability to transport chloride and markedly improved lung function, with an average gain of more than ten per cent. Vertex is launching a long-term, placebo-controlled trial that could lead to F.D.A. approval this year. And, while this drug targets a very specific form of cystic fibrosis that occurs in only four per cent of patients, the fact that similar drugs—which are also intended to address the basic defect in the faulty CFTR protein and which have shown promising results in initial laboratory trials—are being developed by Vertex and other companies seems to signal a new treatment paradigm.

In the past, drugs have been developed that inhibited proteins that were toxic to cells or that stimulated proteins to counterbalance the symptoms from diseased proteins. But Vertex's drugs are among the first that appear to be able to restore the normal function of a mutated protein like the one that causes cystic fibrosis. Researchers caution that further studies are needed, but the convergence of several drugs performing comparable functions might mean an entirely new approach to pharmaceutical research—with the potential to be applied to a wide range of genetic disorders, from Duchenne muscular dystrophy to Huntington's disease and certain kinds of cancer.

The characteristics of cystic fibrosis have long been recognized, if not always understood. In medieval times, a baby who tasted "salty" when kissed would be predicted to die under an evil hex; the autopsy of an emaciated, "bewitched" eleven-year-old girl in 1595 in Leiden, the Netherlands, revealed that the pancreas was swollen, hard, and gleaming white. The name of the disease describes this effect: fluid-filled cavities, or cysts; and prominent scarring, or fibrosis. Dr. Dorothy Hansine Andersen, a pediatrician at Columbia University's Babies & Children's Hospital, in New York City, was the first to identify cystic fibrosis as a disease, in 1935. She also first hypothesized that the disease was a recessive disorder, and was the first doctor to treat children with pancreatic enzymes to improve their digestion.

In 1985, researchers in the United States and Canada discovered that the cystic-fibrosis gene was situated on the seventh chromosome. Two years earlier, Dr. Francis Collins, at Yale, had devised a technique to find a gene by "jumping" over segments of chromosomes. "It's like looking for a burned-out light bulb in the basement of somebody's house," Collins told me. "You search the whole United States, and then you narrow it down to the right state, maybe even the right county, but you still have an awful lot of territory to search through for the burned-out light bulb. You needed a method that would allow you to do a house-to-house search—ideally, one that would allow you to start searching multiple city blocks at once. And that's essentially what chromosome jumping allowed."

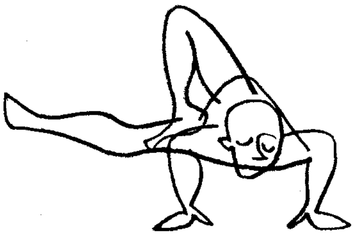
The technology could identify mutations—the burned-out light bulb—in any genetic disorder, but Collins chose to focus on cystic fibrosis, in part because of a young woman he had treated as an intern, in 1977. “I became interested in the condition, and frustrated when I tried to learn more about its genesis, and there was nothing there,” he said. In 1984, Collins moved to the University of Michigan, and in 1987 he began to collaborate with Lap-Chee Tsui and Jack Riordan, researchers in Toronto, to find the exact nature of the cystic-fibrosis mutation. Two years later, the researchers identified the gene and determined its function. Their findings were published as a series of three papers in the journal *Science*.

The discovery of the gene set off a wave of euphoria, with many people convinced that cystic fibrosis would soon be cured. Collins recalled, “You know the affected organs, the lungs and pancreas, you deliver the normal gene, and, bingo! You’d be done.” The N.I.H. spent millions of dollars setting up gene-therapy centers to attempt just that. In 1990, a year after the gene was discovered, researchers published papers on successful laboratory tests in prestigious journals like *Nature* and *Cell.* The New York *Times* reported, “Scientists have cured cystic fibrosis cells in the laboratory by inserting a healthy version of the gene that causes the disease, an unexpectedly swift advance that left researchers almost giddy with delight. The results throw open the door to using human gene therapy to treat the deadly respiratory disorder, the most common fatal genetic ailment in the United States.” Yet, despite the successes in the laboratory, patients had an immune reaction to the procedure, rejecting the delivery system that held the normal gene.

For those who had invested their hopes in the therapy, the disappointment was devastating. Last November, I visited the Cystic Fibrosis Clinic at Children’s Hospital Boston with Dr. Ahmet Uluer, a pediatric pneumologist and the director of the adult cystic-fibrosis program. The mood was sombre: a few days earlier, Dean Barnett, a conservative columnist and political activist in Boston, who had cystic fibrosis, had died, at the age of forty-one. In one examination room, Sabrina Kelley, a twelve-year-old patient, and her father, Brian, a Massachusetts state trooper, were waiting for the doctor. Sabrina had been running a fever for several days; during the previous year, she had spent weeks on intravenous antibiotics for sinus infections and lung infections. “Sabrina was born in 1996, when it was all about gene therapy,” Brian Kelley said. He paused and looked at Dr. Uluer. “You doctors were supposed to fix it,” he said. Kelley has been following the trials of the new drugs, but, he told me, “I have no expectation.”

Dr. Robert Beall, a biochemist who had worked at the N.I.H., joined the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation in 1980 as executive vice-president for medical affairs, and became the president and C.E.O. in 1994. He was determined to find a new approach to treating the underlying genetic defect in cystic fibrosis. “I was on a long plane ride and catching up on reading,” he recalled. “There was an article in *Nature Medicine* on high-throughput screening—using automated systems like robots to test hundreds of thousands of compounds in search of a drug.” Beall sought funding to apply this new technology to cystic-fibrosis research, and in 1998, he approached Roger Tsien, a biologist who was working on ways to track proteins and monitor signals in cells using fluorescence. (Tsien won a Nobel Prize in Chemistry last year for this work.) Tsien had co-founded a biotech company, Aurora Biosciences, in San Diego, which utilized the high-throughput-screening technology.

Realizing that the research would be intensive, and that its results would have a relatively small market, Beall arranged for the foundation to provide Aurora with an initial grant of two million dollars. “Basically, we just wanted to see if they could get going,” Beall said. The company formatted a system to screen for the chemical compounds that facilitated chloride transport, but it would need a larger subsidy in order to continue with the research. In 1999, Beall approached the Gates Foundation. William Gates, Sr., then the head of the foundation, interviewed Beall about the unprecedented idea of correcting a mutated protein with a drug that could be taken orally, would work throughout the body, and would restore functioning of diseased organs. “We sat around his living-room table and wrote a proposal,” Beall told me. “They called us two weeks later and said they were giving us twenty million dollars to start the Aurora project.” The Cystic Fibrosis Foundation contributed seventeen million dollars, from the sale of patent rights to an aerosolized antibiotic. (The foundation often acts as an investor in cystic-fibrosis research done by for-profit companies, and sometimes retains the rights to patents on any drugs produced from such research.) “We knocked the socks off the biotech world,” Beall said. A few years ago, Beall recruited Joseph O’Donnell, a successful businessman whose twelve-year-old son had died of the disease, and who had served on the foundation’s board, to lead an effort to raise a hundred and seventy-five million dollars to contribute to more new drug development; so far, he has garnered a hundred and fifty-one million.



With more than sixteen hundred known mutations in the cystic-fibrosis gene, the process of finding drugs to address the disease’s pathology seemed formidable. But researchers soon realized that these mutations could be grouped into categories. One category of mutations produces a protein that is able to insert itself into the membrane of the cell but contains a “rusty gate” that closes off the passage of chloride. Another group of mutations, the most common, prevents the protein from reaching the membrane. A third category has a so-called “nonsense mutation,” which causes the cell to abruptly terminate production of the protein, making only a fragment.

With the grant from the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, scientists on the Aurora team began screening more than half a million chemical compounds. Once a chemical was found to restore the movement of chloride, the team worked to modify the compound into potable forms that might serve as drugs. Eventually, Aurora identified several compounds that would either wedge open the rusty gate (potentiators) or repair the protein's ability to reach the cell membrane (correctors). "It's sort of molecular origami," Paul Negulescu, who was one of the Aurora researchers, explained. "The CFTR protein has to fold in a certain order in a certain way to work properly, and the mutated cystic-fibrosis protein didn't fold quite right. Just a little tweak, we believe, at one phase of that folding process gets it to the right shape, or otherwise it's like a crumpled piece of paper you can throw away." The drug that Falletti took, known as VX-770, is a potentiator; Vertex Pharmaceuticals (which acquired Aurora in 2001) has also developed a corrector, VX-809, which has been tested in small studies of healthy volunteers and cystic-fibrosis patients, and began a larger clinical trial in cystic-fibrosis patients this year.

"We can't find a compromise between a life of quiet desperation and life in the fast lane."

At the Vertex offices, in Cambridge, Joshua Boger, the C.E.O., and the cystic-fibrosis research team showed me two videos, taken through a microscope, of cells from the lungs of cystic-fibrosis patients. In the first video, a layer of cystic-fibrosis lung cells had uncoördinated, slowly moving cilia that were unable to move mucus off the cell surface. The second video was of cystic-fibrosis cells that had been exposed to a corrector compound. In these cells, the cilia eventually began to beat in a synchronized fashion, like palm fronds swaying back and forth in the wind, showing how bacteria and mucus could be moved from the airways.

Other researchers are developing drugs that operate in similar ways and are also yielding positive results. One such drug targets the nonsense category of mutation. Normal genes contain so-called "stop signs" at the end of their DNA blueprint in order to produce proteins of an appropriate length. The nonsense mutations in cystic fibrosis create an additional, premature stop sign, which arrests synthesis of CFTR; researchers had to find a way to bypass the abnormal stop sign while respecting the normal one. Worldwide, some fifteen per cent of all patients with cystic fibrosis have this kind of nonsense mutation, but more than sixty per cent of patients in Israel carry it. PTC Therapeutics, a New Jersey development company, screened more than a million compounds and chemically optimized these compounds for several years before finding one that masks the abnormal stop sign while letting the cell recognize the normal point of termination.

In a clinical study conducted by PTC in Israel, nineteen patients underwent three months of treatment. Typically, these patients coughed nearly six hundred and fifty times per day. (Healthy people usually cough fewer than sixteen times per day.) During treatment, the nineteen study participants had their rate of coughing reduced by about two hundred times each day. In a study in Europe, lung function improved: pretreatment biopsies of the patients' nasal tissue, which is similar to lung tissue, showed no CFTR protein; after treatment, the protein appeared in its normal place on the cell surface. The drug also restored chloride transport in the airways. Dr. Eitan Kerem, who directs the department of pediatrics at Hadassah Medical Center, in Jerusalem, and is the head of its cystic-fibrosis center, oversaw the pilot study in Israel. "We saw that it improved the physiology—that chloride now could be transported," Kerem said. "But we need a placebo-controlled trial to really know its benefit." An international, placebo-controlled study of two hundred cystic-fibrosis patients will begin in the coming months. "I don't expect to see a complete cure," Kerem, who plans to participate in the study, told me. "But if it can slow the progression of the disease, and patients can receive it at an early age, so they live much longer and much better, *dayenu*"—a Hebrew word meaning "it is enough for us," traditionally used at the Passover seder to express gratitude for the exodus from slavery in Egypt.

These drugs may also have ramifications beyond cystic fibrosis. The drug produced by PTC Therapeutics, for instance, was designed to override any nonsense mutation—and could therefore be applied to a wide number of genetic diseases. (Nearly twenty-five hundred such disorders have been catalogued.) So far, the research team at PTC has provided data that suggest that the drug can bypass the stop mutation in mice genetically engineered to have Duchenne muscular dystrophy, and pilot studies in patients with the disease have shown promising results.

Although the treatment of genetic disorders has long been considered too small a market for most pharmaceutical companies, an increasing number of biotech firms have found that genetic research can be used in broader ways than anticipated. By identifying common protein pathways, a number of researchers say, research conducted to develop drugs that treat relatively rare afflictions may also be applied to a spectrum of illnesses. Mark Murcko, Vertex's chief technology officer, said, "We believe that misfolding diseases can be treated with small-molecule drugs"—these may be oral medications, like those developed for cystic fibrosis, which work throughout the body. Diseases associated with a misfolded protein include Alzheimer's and more commonly occurring diseases, such as cancers that have the mutated p53 gene, thought to be important in certain cancers of the colon, pancreas, and lungs. In malignancies, tumor-suppressor genes, which normally restrain cell growth, acquire mutations, from carcinogens like tobacco smoke and radiation exposure, that eliminate the genes' ability to halt growth. If the promise of corrector drugs like those in development for cystic fibrosis bears out, drugs could also be developed to restore the restraining function of the tumor-suppressor protein. Murcko is also interested in the future possibility that other drugs that facilitate chloride transport might be useful in enhancing the pulmonary function of patients with common lung diseases, such as chronic bronchitis from smoking.

This strategy—pursuing treatments for rare genetic disorders with the intention of finding ways to use them for more common ailments as well—has found adherents outside the biotech world. Dr. Mark Fishman, the president of the Novartis Institutes for BioMedical Research, the pharmaceutical research arm of Novartis, a major global health-care company, has shifted his institute's research program to focus on diseases with well-understood underpinnings, including rare genetic disorders. "If you understand the genetic mechanism, it becomes scientifically tractable to develop drugs," he told me. Novartis, for example, is developing a treatment for Muckle-Wells syndrome, an extremely rare auto-inflammatory disease, which also has the potential to provide relief for those who suffer from gout, rheumatoid arthritis, and some kinds of diabetes. Fishman has been heartened by the advances made by Vertex and PTC in treating cystic fibrosis. "This approach to restoring the protein clearly changes the way you look at the world of drug development," he said.

Francis Collins, who discovered the cystic-fibrosis gene and, until last year, was the director of the National Human Genome Research Institute, at the N.I.H., has helped to establish federal programs to use high-throughput-screening technology to target a variety of mutated proteins, inspired in part by the success in finding new treatments for cystic fibrosis. "If we recognize that most inherited disorders do not have a foundation with the resources cystic fibrosis had, is it realistic to imagine that the same path of drug development could be travelled for other genetic diseases?" he asked. In the absence of private funding, Collins has urged the federal government to fill in the breach. "We have a robot screening three hundred thousand compounds in a span of forty-eight hours, each compound at seven different concentrations," he told me. "There are four screening centers throughout the country. At N.I.H., there is the ability to do animal testing and to see if a compound is ready for human trials." He added, "We have a unique opportunity with this cystic-fibrosis story to figure out how we can help other diseases."

It seems likely that the treatment for cystic fibrosis will ultimately consist of combinations of these targeted therapies, much the way people with AIDS have gained longevity with multi-drug regimens. Because each parent, as a silent carrier, contributes one mutated gene, many children with the disease have two separate defects—for example, a misshapen CFTR mutation and a nonsense mutation, or a misshapen CFTR and a rusty-gate type of mutation. The clinical studies are still in the early stages, so neither the long-term benefits nor the potential side effects are known. Combining drugs might allow for synergy in restoring chloride movement, but it might also lead to toxic interactions, as with any combination therapy.

All the physicians and scientists I talked to who are working on the experimental agents emphasized the many unknown variables, but for the first time there is convincing evidence that the underlying defect in cystic fibrosis can be corrected. Dr. Susanna McColley, the director of the Cystic Fibrosis Center at Children's Memorial Hospital, in Chicago, who did not participate in the Vertex or the PTC studies, told me, "These drugs are absolutely for real. It's very striking, for example, that with the Vertex drug patients showed dramatic improvement and when it was stopped their lung function dropped back down." It was particularly surprising, McColley said, because most experts believed that these patients' lung function had been so destroyed over years of infection that they were incapable of such improvement. "The work with these drugs tells us that maybe we were not ambitious enough in our thinking," she added.

McColley did take part two years ago in studies of denufosol, a drug produced by the biotech company Inspire that works in a different way from the Vertex and PTC drugs, by stimulating an alternative-chloride channel and bypassing the effects of the genetic mutations entirely. The drug, which increases hydration of lungs and helps open airways, is inhaled. In the placebo-controlled trial, involving three hundred and fifty-two patients, those on the drug showed a meaningful improvement in lung function. The study was not limited to a particular category of mutation, and the patients continued their standard therapies, such as antibiotics, during the trial. Dr. Accurso, at the Denver Children's Hospital, acted as the lead principal investigator for denufosol's Phase III clinical trial; one of his patients, Maya Nibbe, a seven-year-old with cystic fibrosis, participated in the study. (Another large clinical study is already under way.) Maya takes some forty pills a day, receives aerosol treatments with bronchodilators, to open her airways, and uses Pulmozyme, an enzyme-based treatment, to thin and loosen the viscous mucus. "During the cold weather, she needed supplemental antibiotics about once every month," her mother, Jennifer Reinhardt, told me when we spoke by phone. While on the denufosol trial, which lasted forty-eight weeks, Maya needed such supplemental antibiotic therapy only once. She has been off the drug for eighteen months, and her lungs are now populated by resistant staphylococcus—MRSA—requiring two months of combination-antibiotic therapy. "It's really hard on her," Maya's mother said. "It's frustrating that we can't have it." ♦

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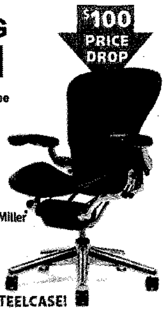

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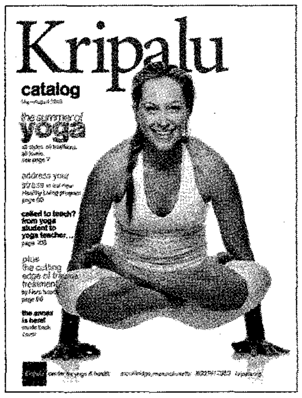

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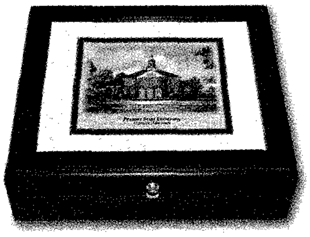

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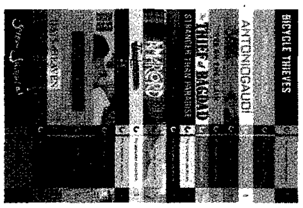

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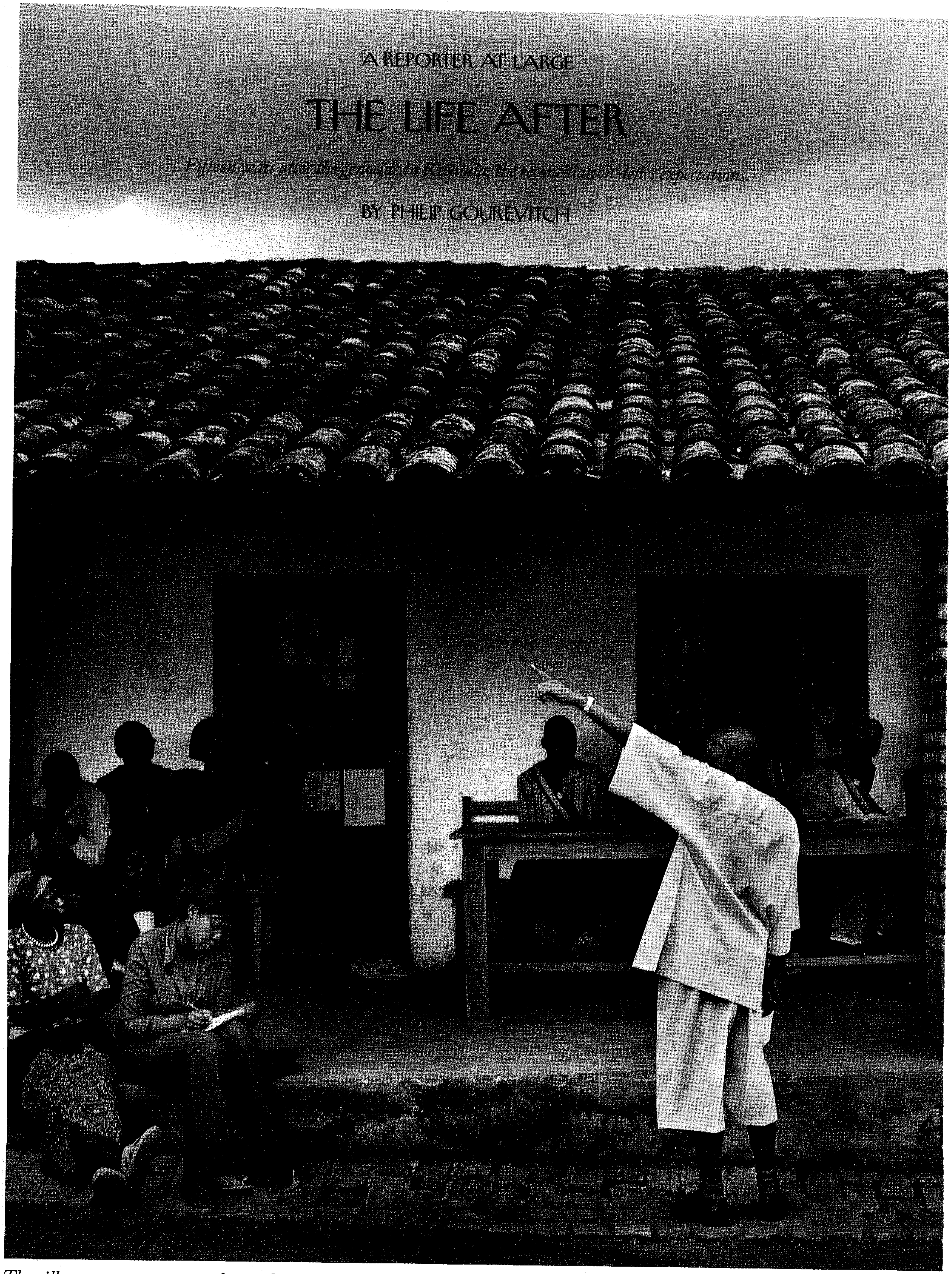
THE LIFE AFTER

Fifteen years after the genocide in Rwanda, the reconciliation defies expectations.

BY PHILIP GOUREVITCH



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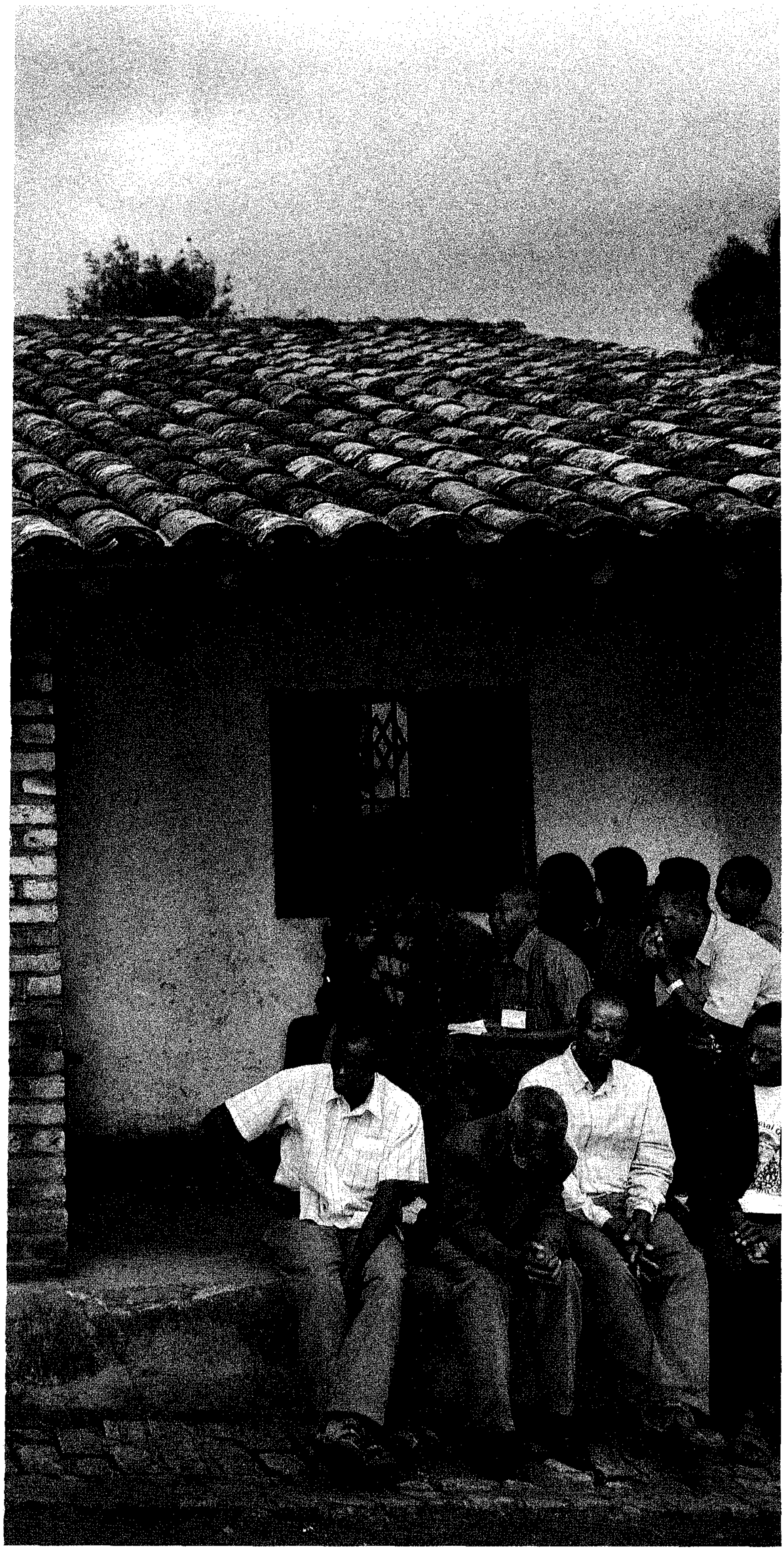
The village gacaca courts were designed not only to render rudimentary justice but to allow some emotional catharsis by establishing a collectiv



ccounting of the crimes where they were committed. Photograph by Kathryn Cook.*

When I began visiting Rwanda, in 1995, a year after the genocide, the country was still pretty well annihilated: blood-sodden and pillaged, with bands of orphans roaming the hills and women who'd been raped squatting in the ruins, its humanity betrayed, its infrastructure trashed, its economy gutted, its government improvised, a garrison state with soldiers everywhere, its court system vitiated, its prisons crammed with murderers, with more murderers still at liberty—hunting survivors and being hunted in turn by revenge killers—and with the routed army and militias of the genocide and a million and a half of their followers camped on the borders, succored by the United Nations refugee agency, and vowing to return and finish the job. In the course of a hundred days, beginning on April 6, 1994, nearly a million people from the Tutsi minority had been massacred in the name of an ideology known as Hutu Power, and, between the memory of the slaughter and the fear that it would resume, Rwanda often felt like an impossible country. Nowadays, when Rwandans look back on the early years of aftermath, they say, "In the beginning."

On the fifteenth anniversary of the genocide, Rwanda is one of the safest and the most orderly countries in Africa. Since 1994, per-capita gross domestic product has nearly tripled, even as the population has increased by nearly twenty-five per cent, to more than ten million. There is national health insurance, and a steadily improving education system. Tourism is a boom industry and a strong draw for foreign capital investment. In Kigali, the capital, whisk-broom-wielding women in frocks and gloves sweep the streets at dawn. Plastic bags are outlawed, to keep litter under control and to protect the environment. Broadband Internet service is widespread in the cities, and networks are being extended into the countryside. Cell phones work nearly everywhere. Traffic police enforce speed limits and the mandatory use of seat belts and motorbike helmets. Government officials are required to be at their desks by seven in the morning. It is the only government on earth in which the majority of parliamentarians are women. Soldiers are almost nowhere to be seen. Kigali is now home to nearly a million people—roughly double the number ten years ago—and there is incessant construction of new homes, office blocks, medical facilities, shopping centers, hotels, schools, transport depots, foreign embassies, and roads. A billboard used to stand beside one of the main traffic circles, riddled by machine-gun fire and advertising Guinness stout with the slogan "The Power of Love"; today, a new billboard across the street says, "Pay Taxes—Build Rwanda—Be Proud." Most of the prisoners accused or convicted of genocide have been released. The death penalty has been abolished. And Rwanda is the only nation where hundreds of thousands of people who took part in mass murder live intermingled at every level of society with the families of their victims.

"So far, so good," Rwanda's President, Paul Kagame, told me. Kagame, who is fifty-one, and is so thin that in official photographs with visiting dignitaries it often looks as if his guests had been posed with a cardboard cutout of him, led the rebel force—the Rwandan Patriotic Front—that stopped the genocide. He has presided over Rwanda's destiny ever since, and he has come to be recognized, by his adversaries and his admirers alike, as one of the most formidable political figures of our age. "Fifteen years," he said. "It sounds like a pretty long time. But if you look at it, and the value of the whole country—maybe where the country has moved to and where it should be—it becomes a very small thing."

Kagame, who is commonly described as authoritarian even in the Rwandan press, was elected in 2003 with more than ninety-five per cent of the vote, after running effectively unopposed. But he told me that if he cannot build the national institutions that allow him to retire and preside over a peaceful transfer of power by 2017, when the Constitution requires that he step aside, then "It's a failure."

In the meantime, it maddens Kagame when Western observers assess Rwanda by how far it still falls short, rather than by how far it has already come. His attitude is: You're telling me? "I wish there were a way of winding time and making it run faster," he said. "I would do it." In his view, the West is in no position to scold Rwanda, where the legacy of colonialism led directly to the genocide, and where some Western powers (notably France and the Vatican) supported the *génocidaires* before, during, and after the killing, while the rest did nothing to stop it. Like most of his original comrades in the R.P.F., Kagame grew up in exile, in Uganda, as a refugee from earlier anti-Tutsi pogroms in Rwanda, and he speaks with contempt of critics of his human-rights record who had accepted for decades the ethnic apartheid of his childhood as a legitimate form of majority rule.

"The first time I came to my country was in 1977," he said. "I was still very young, and I went to some of my relatives who have since been killed in the genocide." In Kagame's youth, Rwanda existed for him only through the memory of his elders and the rumors of fellow-exiles—he was four when his family fled, in 1961—and at the age of nineteen he had slipped back in for that first visit to form his own impression. "Even at that age, I would see the oppression," he said, and went on, "I could see the panic, the sense of frustration and desperation with the people I was visiting. . . . I was just a mere student, you know, just finished secondary school—and this is my aunt, this is my uncle. But every day they were being policed to know who visits them, to know whom they have written a letter to, to know who has written to them. And it's, like, on the one hand they were happy to see me, on the other they wanted me away, they wanted me to leave them alone, because if they discovered that I had come from a refugee camp in Uganda they could easily perish."

I had met Kagame five times between 1995 and 2000; on each occasion, the interview ran for hours, and he often spoke of growing up in exile, and how his experience of exclusion had led him, as a young man, to take up armed struggle. But when he talked of being Tutsi it was always as an identity that had been held against him, never as an affirmative declaration of belonging. And, when he came to power in Rwanda, the fact that he was Tutsi was still held against him. It branded him as a minority, and, to those who persisted in the belief that in Rwanda all politics must be tribal, that made him illegitimate. Kagame did not want to be perceived as the Tutsi President; he wanted to be accepted as the Rwandan President.

Emmanuel Ndahiro, one of Kagame's closest advisers, who is now his intelligence chief, told me how encouraged he was by Barack Obama's election. "Obama represents ideas and thinking, he doesn't represent the blacks," Ndahiro said, and asked, "So why can't a Tutsi be a President where the majority are Hutus?" The genocide made Kagame's challenge harder than ever, and also made it more essential that he succeed. So when Kagame spoke of the terror that his aunt and uncle had accepted as normal, I wondered if he could be sure that Hutus in the countryside didn't feel oppressed, in turn, in post-genocide Rwanda.

"I don't have to tell you this," he said. "Go ask people. They will give you their views." But he told me his view anyway: "Ten million people now in this country have never been happier in the history of this country. It's better, Rwanda, far better than it has ever been. I have no doubt about it. Look around, go around, go to villages. If you fail to see the sense of hope in their eyes, then I won't be telling you the truth."

I set out the next morning for Taba, a village in Rwanda's central highlands. I wanted to see what had become of a woman named Laurencie Nyirabeza, an elderly genocide survivor, and Jean Girumuhatse, the man who in 1994 had massacred a number of people in her family, and left her for dead, too, after striking her with a machete. I had met them in 1996, a few weeks after Kagame sent his army into Congo (or Zaire, as it was called at the time) to drive the vast majority of the Rwandans in the U.N. camps there home, and to hunt down those who resisted repatriation. Girumuhatse had come back from Congo in the mass return a few days before my first visit to Taba. Nyirabeza said that he had asked her to forgive him and she had refused. She showed me where he lived—at the time, he was sharing his home with some genocide survivors who had squatted there in his absence and had not yet found anywhere else to go—and he told me that it was true: he had been the leader of a band of *génocidaires* who manned a roadblock in front of his house, and he said he was responsible for the killings there.

I had been collecting stories of the genocide for a year and a half by then, and Girumuhatse was the first who told me that he had killed. Yet even as he announced his guilt he hedged. He said that he had ordered others to kill, allowing merely that he "might" have been a killer himself. He would admit to having a part in "only" six murders. Some of his accomplices at the roadblock, whom I found in the local lockup, said he had killed more. The survivors I spoke with in Taba agreed: many more, they said. He had even tried to kill his own brother-in-law—Girumuhatse's wife was a Tutsi—but the brother-in-law had escaped into the bush, and when I met him he told me he believed that Girumuhatse had killed at least seventy people.

I spent a week in Taba in December of 1996, and when I returned to Rwanda six months later I wanted to go back to the village. But after the mass repatriation from the border camps there had been a sharp escalation of killings by Hutu insurgents—fighters who had returned from Congo and their comrades who had stayed there and were now sneaking back. The violence was most intense in the north and west of the country, near the Congolese border, but piecemeal attacks had been reported in much of the rest of the country as well, including the ambush of a bus on the Taba road shortly before I arrived. The attacks tended to target Tutsi genocide survivors, who could bear witness against the killers, and even if I could have made the trip safely I did not want to place anyone in Taba at greater risk.

I had always driven myself in Rwanda, but this year Jean-Pierre Sagahutu, my Kinyarwanda translator, drove, and without him I'd have been lost. It wasn't just Kigali that has been transformed in recent years; the roadside landscape, as we headed west into the countryside, also seemed rearranged. Where I remembered an empty valley overgrown with bush, there were now neatly planted fields of beans, manioc, and sorghum, dotted with men hoeing and women stooping to harvest and reseed—a saw mill here, a livestock corral there. Old buildings were missing, new buildings were everywhere, and places where I'd never seen anyone were crowded with foot traffic. Much was familiar. Indeed, much felt eternal: the rise and fall of the sweeping, vaguely Tuscan vistas—rigorously terraced hills, pocked by low stands of banana trees and an occasional towering eucalyptus, with farmhouses clinging to the slopes, and every so often an imposing red brick church on the summit, its bell tower cut against a hazy, cloud-spattered sky.

But I didn't recognize the turnoff to Taba, and the road seemed wrong. I remembered a rutted dirt track that ran through eucalyptus groves; now both sides were lined with the squat, boxlike, adobe dwellings of Rwanda's rural poor, and the surface was wide and smooth. Along the way, we saw bulldozers and graders making improvements. Then we came around a bend, and the picture resolved itself: this was the spot where Girumuhatse's roadblock had been, and here was the big eucalyptus that he had stood under when he watched me drive away after my last visit.

There was someone standing under the tree now. It was Girumuhatse, right where I'd left him. I got out of the car and he came over—a lean man, with a distinctive loping gait. He wore a torn and filthy yellow windbreaker, gray trousers shapeless from use, and yellow rubber clogs. I asked if he recognized me, and he said, "You were here twelve years ago." I was surprised by the precision of his memory, which had been so elusive in the past. "When you left, it was a Saturday," he said. "I was arrested the same day. I spent eleven years in prison, then I confessed everything in *gacaca*"—a system of outdoor community courts, convened for genocide cases. "I asked forgiveness," Girumuhatse said, "and I was released about a year ago."

Gacaca was designed to reward confessions, because the objective was not only to render rudimentary justice and mete out punishment but also to allow some emotional catharsis by establishing a collective accounting of the truth of the crimes in each place where they were committed. During a trial run of *gacaca* courts, in 2005, there were many reports of corrupt judges, and of intimidated witnesses, including an alarming number of cases in which genocide survivors were murdered before they could testify. Whenever that happened, Emmanuel Ndahiro told me, Tutsis in the villages would be muttering, "Kagame loves Hutus." And Richard Sezibera, the minister of health, told me that such killings could undermine years of progress toward what is officially called "reconciliation." "You can't imagine the psychosis in this country," Sezibera said.

Last year, however, the government decided to clear the genocide caseload. More than twelve thousand *gacaca* courts were convened around the country, and, according to official statistics, more than a million cases were adjudicated, with a remarkably high degree of public participation, and limited violence. There were surely false convictions of those who insisted on their innocence, and there was a surprising number of acquittals of those who had probably been falsely accused in the first place. But in many cases, like Girumuhatse's, confession was its own reward: a sentence for multiple murders re-

Who among you can rescue the fair princess from obscurity?
Shanahan

THE AGENTS OF THE ROUND TABLE

"Bear with me—I put my hat on upside down."

duced to little more than time served.

Girumuhatse led us to his house, a low adobe with no right angles, no windows, and no door, only a doorway. A teen-age boy rose from a bed in one corner, shedding a blanket, and shuffled out. Girumuhatse fetched folding chairs, and we sat down to talk. He was breathing hard, as he always did when we met in the past, taking his air in short, rapid puffs. He said that in prison he had been given a diagnosis of severe asthma, and he showed me his prison-release papers, which he kept in a book entitled "Glorifying God in Song"—a hymnal. I asked him if his punishment had been just. "I think it was a short sentence," he said. "For my crimes, I should have been punished much longer, and still be in prison." Sagahutu, my translator, whose father was killed in the genocide, remarked, "Yeah, they all say that."

Girumuhatse said that the judges at his *gacaca* trial had found his confession to be accurate and complete, so I asked him how many people he had confessed to killing. He began reciting names, sometimes a first name, sometimes a last name, sometimes both. He said, "Eric and his brother Mugabo. Munyaneza. Oswald Twamugabo. Candide. Donatille and the baby on her back. Stanislas Busirimu and his son Wellars Busirimu. Gakombe. Ntampuhwe. That's all."

Eleven people. I asked how old they were. He told me, "Eric and Mugabo were about thirteen years old—not twins, they were brothers by different mothers. Munyaneza was about seventy. Oswald Twamugabo was in his early thirties. Candide was about fifty-five. Donatille with the baby was thirty. Stanislas Busirimu was sixty and his son Wellars about twenty-five. Gakombe was fifty. Ntampuhwe was sixty-five." He said, "None of these were killed at the roadblock. They were people I hunted at their houses and in the bush. And the other dead, at the roadblock, I explained in *gacaca* what had happened in those cases, too." He did not tell me their names. He said, "During the *gacaca* trial, since everyone was there—all the people of the village—I said, I will tell you everything. I even showed them where I threw the corpses. And I was a witness in the trials of others, all the trials."

I had always been told that Girumuhatse killed with a machete, but he said that he had preferred to use a *masu*, a nail-studded club. He described killing Oswald Twamugabo. "I hit him in the head with my club and when he fell to the ground I crushed his skull." It was that easy. "The Tutsis in '94 knew they were to be killed," Girumuhatse explained. "They had got weak in their heads, and so their bodies were weak. They expected it. We felled them like cows." Since his release from prison, he said, he had made amends with "everyone in the village": "I went from door to door asking forgiveness. I come to the house. I ask for the person. I say, I am here to ask for your pardon." He was not afraid of the survivors, although he was sometimes afraid of the other killers he had testified against. "Nobody ever threatens me," he said. "But I don't stay out late. I come home by seven o'clock. I stay in with my wife and children. So if I am killed it will be at home, and if someone else is killed, and they blame the former prisoners, I am here, nobody can blame me."

Everything that Girumuhatse said came out with the same swift, emotionless directness. He never hesitated before answering a question. He listened, hunched slightly forward on his chair, watching a chicken pecking around outside the doorway, then looked directly at my translator, and sometimes at me, when he spoke. He was, after all, a veteran of many *gacaca* trials: a professional witness—he knew what to say. He said, "I regret killing people for nothing. I regret killing neighbors who were friends or I had no problem with them." He said, "In 1994, we were just like animals, we could not reason. It was the state that told us the enemy was a Tutsi, and when I killed it was like communal work duty." The fact that his wife was a Tutsi hadn't troubled him, he said, "because I love her very much" and "really, she had become a Hutu like me." Nothing seemed to have troubled him when he went to work with his club, and I wondered whether he had enjoyed it.

"Yes," he said. "For me, it became a pleasure to kill. The first time, it's to please the government. After that, I developed a taste for it. I hunted and caught and killed with real enthusiasm. It was work, but work that I enjoyed. It wasn't like working for the government. It was like doing your own true job—like working for myself." He said, "I was very, very excited when I killed. I remember each killing. Yes, I woke every morning excited to go into the bush. It was the hunt—the human hunt." And he said, "The genocide was like a festival. At day's end, or any time there was an occasion, we took a cow from the Tutsis, and slaughtered it and grilled it and drank beer. There were no limits anymore. It was a festival. We celebrated."

So Girumuhatse had found his vocation as a murderer. Before that, he had been a peasant, as he was again now, living in poverty and toil, tending the fields of slightly less poor peasants for beer money and enough beans and bananas to sustain himself, his wife, and seven children. But for a few months in 1994 Rwanda had become a kingdom of death and he had lived more fully, more like a lord, than he had ever imagined possible. It occurred to me that, just as the genocide had set him free, the *gacaca* process had liberated him to talk about it. I had no doubt that he was still hiding more from me than he was telling, but Girumuhatse had revealed himself. The law required that he be accepted for that. "Now," he said, "when I go to people's houses and ask forgiveness, they say, 'O.K.—you told the truth.'"

It was not so easy for the survivors. Girumuhatse's brother-in-law, Evariste, lived just a few hundred yards away, in a new house—a modest place, but generously proportioned by village standards. There was a fresh harvest of beans drying out front, and from where we sat, in a narrow entry parlor, a doorway led into the kitchen and a further doorway opened into a cowshed where a single heifer stood munching cud. Evariste and his wife had six children; the oldest was thirteen, and the youngest was two—a cheerful little boy, who pranced from room to room playing with a ball. A sister of Evariste's was there as well, visiting from out of town, and wearing a festive dress. A clump of pink cloth flowers sat in a pot on the parlor coffee table, and the only other ornament in the room was a giant 2003 campaign-poster portrait of Kagame.

Evariste had attended Girumuhatse's *gacaca* trial. "He really said everything, everything," Evariste said. When Girumuhatse had come to him and asked for forgiveness, Evariste told him that he forgave him. But he said to me, "All this reconciliation and the confessions—that's the program of the state. And when a killer comes and asks your pardon you can't do anything else. You pardon him, but you don't really know if it comes from your heart, because you don't really know about the killer—if he is asking forgiveness from his heart."

Still, Evariste believed that it was better to fake it than not. "For a survivor, when you see a killer you're a bit shocked, and it only makes sense to have fear," he said. "But you can't do anything. You can't kill him. And the killer—it's better if he comes and says hello than if he flees, because it creates a climate of great distrust when a killer avoids a survivor and won't greet him. But there is really no solution. In the evening, you see someone, you fear. At home, at night, when I think of it I'm afraid. It's the situation of the whole country."

Evariste's sister, Mariane, who had seemed high-spirited and chatty when I arrived, had turned away with pursed lips at the first mention of Girumuhatse. Now she let loose: "I can't understand a person who kills ten people and asks for pardon. It's always a problem to live with them, and if I could afford to live somewhere else I would leave this country." Girumuhatse's wife—her sister—had come with him when he asked Mariane for pardon. "But this is all theatre," she said. "It doesn't mean anything. A killer is a killer, and you have to abandon them. I just can't support it. Yes, I visit my sister. My sister lives with a killer because they have children together, and it's not the children's fault, and to make a child is not a game. Yes, when I visit my sister I speak with him, but it's theatre. . . . If ever the occasion arose, if there was an opportunity, they would kill again. Because I think they're all killers. They only asked pardon because of *gacaca*. Why didn't they ask forgiveness before *gacaca*? It's because of the President that they don't kill. Forgiveness came from a Presidential order. He's the one who pardoned them." She glanced up at the enormous head of Kagame on the wall, staring coldly out through wire-rimmed glasses. "Yes," she said. "If he were not there, we would all be killed."

With that, Mariane sat back in her chair, her tension apparently spent. The conversation drifted for a while to happier subjects—the economy, the harvest, the cow out back. Then Mariane spoke again. "It becomes a bit easier with time," she said. "Because people are more or less safe, and we're at a stage where the killers and the survivors can speak. It's a kind of trust, and it takes a very, very long time."

A light rain began as we left Evariste's, and we drove a few hundred yards back past Girumuhatse's place, to the home of Laurencie Nyirabeza, the woman who had first told me about him. The house was about the same size as Evariste's, but much older and more weathered. In the damp gloomy light of the late afternoon, it looked barren and abandoned, but a young woman came out to greet us, and another was in the parlor—Nyirabeza's granddaughters. They were sisters, in their mid-twenties, and had been orphaned in the genocide; Nyirabeza had looked after them, and now they looked after her. She was seventy-nine, and in bed. Eventually, she emerged, a tiny bowed figure, barefoot and wrapped in a bright blue-and-yellow batik, supporting herself with both hands on a tall wooden staff, which she worked in a rowing motion, easing her way to a chair as if she were in a dugout in shallow water. Her wizened face wore a quizzical, inward expression, at once witty and distant, but she spoke with great presence.

Nyirabeza had worked for the *gacaca* courts, and she had not been impressed. "It's an official thing," she said. "Even when the killers ask forgiveness, it's from the government and the Rwandan people and the victims, but they never name our names." I read to her the names of the people Girumuhatse told me he'd killed. "Munyaneza was my brother," she said. "I was at his house during the genocide. Oswald was my nephew. Wellars and Stanislas—neighbors. Gakombe, too, a neighbor. Ntampuhwe was also my nephew. And he also killed Ntampuhwe's children, which he didn't say." One of the granddaughters told me that the thirteen-year-old brothers Girumuhatse killed, Eric and Mugabo, were her schoolmates.

"When he killed Munyaneza, my brother, he struck him and he threw him alive in a latrine to die," Nyirabeza said. "So it's true that he told a lot in *gacaca*—because he was a big killer." But she had not attended Girumuhatse's trial. "I was sick," she said. "Ever since Jean hit me, I don't feel well." And, she said, "He never came here." She spat on the floor and turned away. "Nobody's come to see me and ask for pardon, and I wouldn't give it. I've heard about reconciliation on the radio, but it doesn't bring back my family."

As she spoke, Nyirabeza pulled her batik wrap slowly up from her shoulders until it covered her head. Then she fell silent, and curled into herself until she was entirely covered. After a while, she began to shiver, and her granddaughters helped her to her feet and led her back to bed.

The granddaughters, who had listened to Nyirabeza in silence, became talkative after she was gone. "It's much better here now than twelve years ago," one said, but she added, "Economically, it was better before '94, because now we live in a village built by the government and it's not near our fields. They built these villages by the road for security, because there were times when people were threatened or were killed in their fields. And before '94 we had families—we had parents who helped us live. And now we're by ourselves."

I didn't see any great hope in the eyes of the people I visited in Taba. But as I travelled around Rwanda there was a greater sense of ease among people than I remembered. It wasn't anything that you'd notice if you hadn't been there before, because what I was feeling wasn't so much the presence of strikingly positive energy but, rather, the absence of a mood of wary inwardness. The country was becoming less spooked. At times, it was simply a neutral place to be, like anywhere else. It was normal, which was extraordinary.

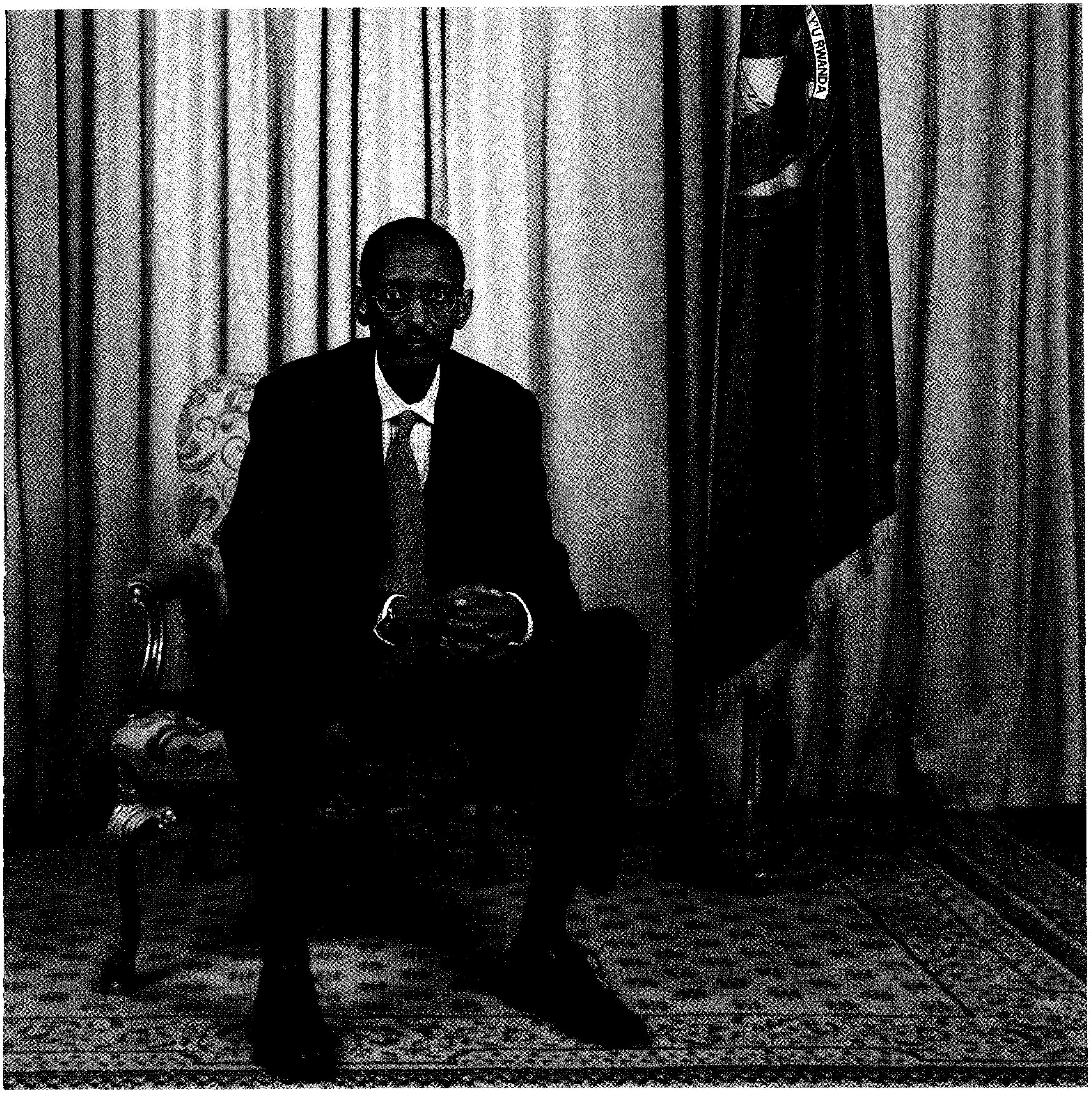
I never did meet a survivor who spoke well of *gacaca*. "It's awful," a friend of mine in Kigali said, a gentle family man of enormous quiet strength, who had served for a time as a minister in Kagame's government, and now worked in the private sector. For nearly a year, he had had to go back again and again to the village where his mother had lived to attend the trials of her murderers. He was glad to learn the truth, but he said, "The arrogance of these guys—just standing there, telling how they killed my mother, where they threw her. It was nothing to them. So arrogant." He found the confessions unbearable; others complained of the stonewalling, the denials and evasions. A woman who had just sat through the *gacaca* trial of a man accused of helping to kill one of her brothers told me, "They all say the same thing—'I was sick during the genocide, I never left the house, I never looked out the window.' It's ridiculous. This man's own brother was already convicted of killing my brother, and it's this guilty brother of his who implicated him." The woman told me that of her parents' ten children six had been killed in 1994, and that those who survived had all been in Europe. "They talk about reconciliation. It's the reverse. Every time I come to *gacaca* with an open mind, I just get more upset."

But none of the survivors I spoke with thought that there was any better solution. Never mind reconciliation, Tutsis and Hutus had to coexist. Sagahutu expressed the sentiment most succinctly: "It's our obligation, and it's our only way to survive, and I do it every day, and I still can't comprehend it." When I repeated Sagahutu's formulation to other survivors and to members of Kagame's Cabinet, it was always met with recognition: Yes, that's it. So what was required politically was emotionally incomprehensible, and the President's idea of the common good hung in the balance.

"At the beginning, it is very fragile, but with time I think it holds," Kagame told me. "People's hearts and minds need some time to heal. A very long time indeed. They will probably need a whole generation, and the memories will keep lingering." Then he told me a story. Every year, on April 7th, Kagame presides over a national genocide-commemoration ceremony at one of the major massacre sites that have been preserved as memorials to the victims. In 2005, the ceremony was at Murambi, where a young man in his mid-twenties got up to speak. "A survivor," Kagame said. "Somebody who actually was killed, almost, and dumped in a mass grave of close to four thousand people. Our forces arrived after they had just been killed and brought out twelve people from the mass grave who lived, survived. They had been cut with machetes and were in very bad shape. They were treated and nursed, and over time this young person was there giving testimony of what happened."

President Kagame answers critics who asse

Kagame told me that when the young man got to the end of his account he said, "Recently, some of those people who killed our families and killed us have been released. . . . They are there in the village living normally." It was Kagame, of course, who had issued the order granting the killers their reprieve, so after the ceremony he called the young man over. "And I asked him, How do you manage? When you meet them, what do they tell you or what do you tell them? What is your feeling? I want you to gen-



Rwanda by how far it still falls short, "I wish there were a way of winding time and making it run faster." Photograph by Pieter Hugo.

uinely tell me how you feel. This young man looked me in the face and he said, 'Well, President, I manage because you ask us to manage.' "

Kagame repeated the man's words in a tone of some astonishment—"This is what he told me. He said, 'President, I manage because you ask us to manage' "—as if he had only just heard in them the echo of the soul-molding power of his office. But there was a chastening twist at the end of the young survivor's story. It turned out that the released killers avoided him in his village. "They would rather take another route," Kagame said. "When he passes them, they always look down. It was very revealing. You see, it's like, We are managing because what else?"

In other words, I suggested, the young man wasn't managing so well, after all.

"Yes," Kagame said. "That's really what he meant."

Such was the hard bargain of Rwanda's reconciliation project. The common presumption among Western critics of *gacaca*, who lodge their complaints in the language of international law and human rights, is that the system fails to offer the accused sufficient protection and consideration. But the shortcomings cut both ways. "Not the victims, not the perpetrators—nobody will tell you he is happy with the *gacaca*," Kagame said, and he thought that was probably the best one could hope for. He didn't want either side to be happy—"because whichever way we go we are left with nothing." *Gacaca*, he said, "gives us something to build on," and he understood that ultimately the system asked more of survivors than it does of *génocidaires*.

"That's the dilemma," Kagame said, and he added, "The heart of the matter is in these stories." Then, after a moment, he said, "In April, when I'm talking to whatever part of the audience that I address on that commemoration day, I have a moment to spill out this anger. In politics or in diplomacy, you don't spill out the anger sufficiently. And that's why one time I said, I wish I had to fight another war, literally." He went on, "The battlefield has a definition, it has very clear lines, and even though it relies on tactics and strategy and bravery and so on, it provides the way to vent your anger and get it out. But managing these fluid situations, and then the politics and the histories and the cultures—fighting this in the way we do in modern times consumes a lot of energy and drives somebody crazy."

When Jean Girumuhatse spoke of the pleasure that killing had given him, I asked him if he thought it could happen again. "No," he said. "Because 1994 was a big lesson. I respect the authorities today, but if they told me to kill I would not." A clever dodge: he was saying that he would not kill for Kagame's government. Yet, a moment later, he said that when he was in the U.N. camps in Congo, from 1994 to 1996, "there were a lot of extremists" who "always said we'd return in arms" to Rwanda, but "unfortunately" the Rwandan Army had attacked the camps first.

Girumuhatse said that even as he was rendering his confession to the *gacaca* tribunal, a year and a half ago, he had continued to hope that his old extremist comrades who had remained in Congo after the breakup of the camps would reconquer Rwanda. "In prison, we all thought there was still an army outside the country that would come to liberate us, and now we see that it's not true," he said, and added, "It was a dream that we told each other." In fact, there still is a genocidal Hutu army outside Rwanda. It is right where Girumuhatse left it, in Congo, and its presence there is one of the chief causes of the wars that have ravaged that vast country since the Rwandan genocide. After all, for most of the past fifteen years, the Hutu fighters have operated in Congo as the guests or allies of a succession of Congolese governments.

TREATMENT

It's a little spa for the mind—seeing butterflies
set themselves down by the dozen like easels

on bromeliads, when out on the street the boutiques
are dilapidated, construction can't be told from ruin.

A single taste bud magnified resembles an orchid
but what that one's drinking from is a woman's eye

which must be brineless. I wonder what she consumes
that her tears taste like fructose. For minutes she's all its.

Then the moon rises and the river flows backward.
Composed of millions of tiny north poles, iron's

punched out of the environment, hammered into railways.
Pubs serve shepherd's pies with marcelled mashed-potato crusts

and each tree casts its shade in the form of its summary leaf.
Is a woman's eye a single taste bud magnified?

Yet construction can't be told from ruin.
Out on the street the boutiques are dilapidated

by the dozen like easels. And the mind—it's a little spa.

—*Ange Mlinko*

In Kigali, in January, I met a man named Paul Rwarakabije, who was, for nearly a decade, one of the top officers of this genocidal army in exile and, for a time, its over-all commander. Rwarakabije was a professional soldier, and a pure product of Rwanda's ancien régime: a graduate of the École Supérieure Militaire, in Kigali, and of advanced officer-training programs in France and Belgium. He came from northwestern Rwanda, a region that had been the Hutu Power heartland; in 1990, when the war with the R.P.F. broke out in Rwanda, he served at the front as the leader of a combat battalion, and he served in the high command during the genocide, too. Yet today he is a general in the Rwandan Defense Force—Kagame's Army—and entitled to all the rights and respect befitting his rank, including a full pension upon retirement. When I asked him how that came about, he told me the story of his life as an enemy of the cause he now serves, and he told it without apology, even at times with pride, as if he had only been fighting for his country all along and by losing he had wound up winning.

Still, Rwarakabije was circumspect. When he spoke of war-fighting—his soldiers against the other side's—he used the first person: he said "we" regrouped in Congo, "we" recruited in the camps, "we" got arms from Mobutu. (Mobutu Sese Seko, the Congolese dictator, was a great patron of Hutu Power, especially when the *génocidaires* in the camps began massacring Congolese Tutsis, and driving tens of thousands of them into Rwanda as refugees.) But when he spoke of genocide—killing Tutsis for the sake of killing Tutsis—Rwarakabije used the third person to describe the crimes of his old comrades in arms. "When they were in the camps, they went to hunt the Tutsis," he said of the ethnic cleansing in Congo. He even slipped into the second person to describe the cross-border attacks that his troops in the camps launched inside Rwanda, to slaughter survivors, and sow terror and instability. "You also saw the operations of destabilization of Rwanda at that time," he said.

Of course, Rwarakabije was deeply involved in all these activities. He was a brigade commander in his camp, Katale, in the Congolese province of North Kivu—the same camp, as it happened, where Girumuhatse had been. Katale was known as one of the most militarized of the U.N. camps. (In 1995, a relief worker named Richard Danziger told me that, driving to Katale early one morning, he had been greeted by a strange, high whining noise as he approached—a sound that he could not identify until he rounded a bend and found the road blocked by scores of young men who were using the tarmac as a whetstone to sharpen their machetes.) The message that camp leaders like Rwarakabije used to recruit new fighters was simple: if you go home, the Tutsis will kill you. In reality, the vast majority of Hutu civilians who returned were reintegrated into their communities, while former soldiers were sent to demobilization camps and sometimes were even recruited into the Rwandan Army. For Rwarakabije and his fellow-officers in exile, the message that to go home was to go to one's death was effective, a logical perversion of the golden rule: they will do unto you as you would do unto them.

After the camps were destroyed, in 1996, most of the Rwandan Hutus who remained in Congo fled west into the equatorial rain forests, where the Rwandan Army pursued them, accompanied by a Congolese rebel alliance that swept across the country and, with the support of the armies of at least half a dozen other African states, overthrew Mobutu, installing in his place the rebel leader Laurent Kabila. Mobutu's pathetic army had barely put up resistance; the only people who fought hard for him were the fugitive Hutu *génocidaires*, and in the course of the campaign the Rwandan Army killed tens of thousands of them and their civilian followers. At the same time, large groups of Rwandan Hutus gave up and were sent home, while others took refuge in neighboring countries.

Rwarakabije had remained in eastern Congo with a contingent of fighters from the camps, who waited until the Rwandan Army had passed by, and then began moving in small parties into Rwanda to fight in the north and west of the country. The "war of infiltration," as this insurgency came to be known, lasted for a year and a half, and, as it intensified in the latter half of 1997, its original leader and then his replacement were killed, leaving Rwarakabije in command. His fighters mingled with the local population, who accommodated them—in sympathy and in fear—and who suffered accordingly.

"That was real combat in '97 and '98," Rwarakabije said. In the camps, when the *génocidaires* plotted their return to Rwanda, "the aim was to retake power." But now, with their forces depleted and scattered, he told me, "we said, Instead of dying in exile, we'll go die in our homeland." There was no hope of victory, and no cause to fight for; the objective was simply to visit destruction on the country they could not have. "It was a sort of *sauve qui peut*," Rwarakabije said—every man for himself. So Rwarakabije's forces slaughtered Tutsis wherever they found them, and the Rwandan Army fought back just as hard—and at least ten thousand fighters and civilians were killed, while hundreds of thousands of villagers were displaced and rounded up into holding camps until the insurgency was suppressed, in the summer of 1998. "The Army chased us out once more," Rwarakabije said. "They returned from Congo, and we returned to Congo."

At almost the same moment, a thousand miles away in the Congolese capital, Kinshasa, President Kabila, who had proved to be every bit as capricious as Mobutu, and even less popular, turned against the Rwandan Army, which had helped put him in office, and embraced instead the Hutu fighters whom he had helped to pursue on his march to power. Rwanda struck back swiftly, reoccupying much of Congo. Anti-Tutsi propaganda filled the airwaves, and Tutsis were hunted in the streets. Kagame said that he wasn't leaving until there was a Congolese government in place that promised to disarm and disband the genocidal Rwandan renegades. Instead, the Congolese President put his son, Joseph Kabila, in charge of military operations, and, following in Mobutu's footsteps, he mustered the fugitive Hutu army as his special forces. "We profited," Rwarakabije said, "because it was he who gave us the equipment, the war matériel, the ammunition, and the arms."

Congo was soon split up, with Rwanda and its local proxies occupying much of the eastern part for the next five years. The bond between Kinshasa and the fugitive *génocidaires* grew stronger in 2001, when Laurent Kabila was assassinated—shot point-blank by his own bodyguard—and Joseph Kabila succeeded him as President. By then, the scattered Hutu forces had fully reunited, forming an army of some twelve thousand fighters, who called themselves the F.D.L.R. (Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda), and in 2003 Rwarakabije became its overall commander. But, he told me, he no longer had the will to fight.

Rwarakabije said that his change of heart had begun two years earlier, after the F.D.L.R. attempted a major attack on Rwanda, and the Rwandan Army captured nearly two thousand of his men. Rwarakabije had assumed that they would all be killed. Instead, the prisoners were sent to demobilization camps, to be reformed and instructed in the ways of civilian life in post-genocide Rwanda. "And after the training they were returned to their homes," Rwarakabije said. He was stunned. Until then, he said, he had always regarded the Rwandan Army as "the worst—they're vile, they're killers, they'll do anything." But when he saw that the soldiers he had lost were spared, he convened several like-minded officers to evaluate the situation. "We said, Look at the war that we have fought until now. We lost the war of 1990 to 1994. And '97, '98 we lost again. In 2001, we lost, and a great number of people were captured. Are we going to continue to fight? For what? And so our reasoning brought us to the question: Can we still change?"

Rwarakabije wanted more information, and he took his time collecting it. In 2003, he said, the F.D.L.R. was preparing another attack on Rwanda, but this time, he said, he sent a spy into the country first, to talk to family members of his troops, and to friends, people who had supported the insurgents during the war of infiltration five years earlier. Now the message from those same people was: "When you make war, it's we, the population, who suffer. We die from the bullets and we just can't keep it up." Rwarakabije realized that his war was no longer welcomed by the people he claimed to be fighting for. "They told us, Stop. Stop. The fighting is destroying us instead of constructing us." He decided not to go ahead with the attacks, but he knew his comrades: they had always been glad to execute deserters.

“I began to think about my life, too,” he said, and he told me that he set about establishing phone contact with the chief of general staff of the Rwandan Army, General James Kabarebe, the man who had led Rwanda’s wars in Congo and whom the F.D.L.R. accused of killing its people en masse. Kabarebe remembers it differently. He said that it was he who reached out to Rwarakabije. In any case, when they spoke Kabarebe told Rwarakabije that he would be welcomed if he came home. They stayed in touch, talking regularly for months. Kabarebe invited Rwarakabije to send some of his officers to Rwanda to have a look around. “We’ll protect them,” Kabarebe said, but none of Rwarakabije’s men were willing to go. Rwarakabije then proposed that he be allowed to return to Rwanda with a hundred and three men in arms: not to fight but so as not to draw attention as they left Congo, and as a matter of pride—which is how the scenario played out, in the middle of a November night in 2003.

“I was done with the war of rebellion,” Rwarakabije told me. “So I was a collaborator with the country.” Rwarakabije still speaks of himself as the commander of the twelve thousand fighters he left behind, and for the past five years he has worked for Rwanda’s demobilization commission, sending the message to the F.D.L.R. that there is no future for them in Congo, and helping those who come home to adjust. “Because we don’t want our colleagues to die in the forest,” he said. And, gradually, singly or in small groups, about half of his men have returned in his wake.

Rwarakabije is hardly alone in his efforts. Kagame told me that family members are often sent into Congo to persuade their F.D.L.R. relations to surrender. “The wife comes and shows up and says, Your four children are still alive, they are in school, we are happy, what are you doing here?” he said. “And the man the next day makes the decision to leave, because, after all, he can really tell for himself what he is experiencing on the other side.” Sometimes, he said, a little money can help, too. Fighters who have genocide crimes to answer for may have to submit to *gacaca*, but a great many of the F.D.L.R. troops are too young to be charged. “I would say they are now indoctrinated in the ideology of genocide but they are not *génocidaires*,” Rwarakabije said.

Kagame said that last April, during the genocide-commemoration ceremony in the Bugesera district, south of Kigali, an old man addressed the gathering, telling stories of the genocide, and naming offenders as he went. At one point, Kagame told me, “this old man said, ‘There was a man here called Rwarakabije.’ And Rwarakabije was there with all of us. He was with the officers in Army uniforms with pips—he was a major general.” The old man had terrible memories of Rwarakabije, and he remarked that Rwarakabije must be with the masterminds of the genocide who were on trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, the U.N. court in Arusha, Tanzania. “You know, there was that atmosphere of sadness,” Kagame said. “But everybody burst out laughing—the whole area where the officers were sitting.” Remembering the moment, Kagame laughed again. “This is the way of our life,” he said.

Rwarakabije has not been prosecuted. Kagame told me that that was for the best. “You see, here we are trying to maneuver through very, very complex terrain, and it’s like you always look for some opening and we exploit it as much as we can,” he said. Even before the genocide, Kagame had made a point of absorbing enemy defectors and dissidents into the R.P.F., and if the risk of such a strategy seemed greater after 1994 so did the reward. “I have come under fire from my own people for some of the things I have done,” he said. “It’s, No, no. It’s, You are favoring the other group. And I tell them no, for me I know one group—one group of Rwandans.”

Although the R.P.F. has delivered some of its own to the genocide courts, Kagame continues to draw criticism for refusing to prosecute some of his soldiers for revenge killings after the genocide, and for war crimes committed during counter-insurgency operations. He clearly favors political expediency over justice. He doesn’t want to have to prosecute either his former soldiers or Rwarakabije for their crimes during the war of infiltration. After all, he said, “how we have treated Rwarakabije—it helps to win others over,” and he added, “We don’t want really to be stuck in the complexities of our past.”

At Rwanda’s demobilization camps, former F.D.L.R. fighters are given reintegration training; they are taught to use banks, and to form business collectives. When they complete the program, the government gives each of them a few hundred dollars—a handsome sum—to reëstablish himself; and when they go home community monitors regularly follow up with them to insure that they are finding a place in civilian life. This is more than the government has done for survivors, or for children born of genocide rapes. The political calculus is clear: resources are painfully limited, and neglected victims pose no immediate threat to society. Rwarakabije clearly approved of this system, but, when I asked him if Rwanda is better today than it was before the genocide, he threw up his hands. “Ahh—bah! I’m not saying,” he said.

A year after the genocide, a World Bank team came through Rwanda to survey its economic condition and prospects, and in summing up its findings one of the team members told a Kagame adviser, “Rwanda is a nonviable country.” Today, Kagame will tell you that the No. 1 threat to the country is not ethnic extremism or violence but the underlying scourge of poverty, and when I reminded him of that World Bank assessment he said, “The same people who were saying that Rwanda is not viable economically, they are the same people who were saying that the Hutus and the Tutsis can’t live together.”

Although Rwanda still relies on foreign aid for roughly half its budget, Kagame regards aid-dependency as one of the greatest obstacles to development in post-colonial Africa, and he sees his promotion of trade and entrepreneurship as a continuation of the liberation struggle. Rwanda has just signed a three-hundred-million-dollar deal with an American energy company to extract vast stores of methane from Lake Kivu, which forms much of Rwanda's border with Congo. The methane will drive electrical generators, more than doubling the national supply while cutting the price by more than half. There are now also mining operations in Rwanda, producing respectable amounts of cassiterite, coltan, wolframite, and gold. There are plans to create a large new airport and a free-trade zone about half an hour outside Kigali, and to set up a railroad link to a port in Tanzania. Banks are proliferating, and, increasingly, white-collar professionals from other East African countries are coming to Rwanda in search of opportunity.

Everything is still very rudimentary; the country cannot train new employees as fast as they are needed, but Kagame is frequently out in the world—Davos, New York, Beijing—trying to lure private investors. At home, he plays host to visiting members of the global—and particularly the American—power élite: Bill Clinton, Pastor Rick Warren, and Michael Porter, the head of the Harvard Business School's Institute for Strategy and Competitiveness, are all friends of Kagame and members of his kitchen cabinet of advisers. Paul Farmer's organization works to provide medical services there. Google's C.E.O., Eric Schmidt, is in the Rwanda loop, too. As an apostle of entrepreneurial self-reliance, Kagame does not want Rwanda to be like any other African country; his model is Singapore.

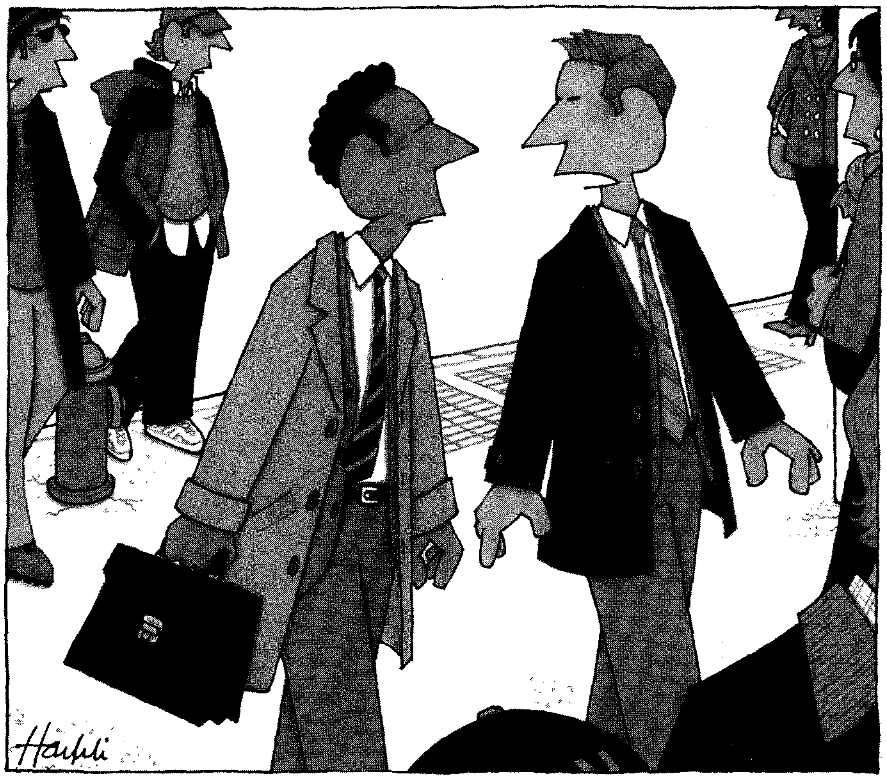
In his Cabinet and, more broadly, in the R.P.F., Kagame is often referred to as the Boss, and he is known as an exacting and exhausting taskmaster. He is a great believer in competition at each level of society. Every year, he takes his government on retreats, during which Cabinet members and senior legislators make public declarations of their goals and are then pressed to meet them. The same goes for local government leaders, and Kagame frequently travels the countryside lambasting lazy public officials in front of their constituents, demanding more hard work and higher standards, and insisting on individual accountability not only on the part of civil servants but from every citizen. Communities are required to take responsibility for the poorest among them, and seek collective solutions to families that fall into delinquency owing to alcoholism or other dysfunction. And villages compete against one another in annual poverty-alleviation contests.

There has been a broad shift away from the genocide-tainted Catholic Church on the part of Rwanda's overwhelmingly Christian population, and Kagame has responded by welcoming Protestant evangelists into the country. He has embraced Pastor Warren's "Purpose Driven" mission as the closest thing to an official state religion. It is Warren's pragmatism and entrepreneurial skills that Kagame particularly admires. He is glad to see others turn to God in the face of cosmic questions of life and death, reconciliation and forgiveness, but Kagame told me that he himself remains only minimally religious. "I go on the side of purpose," he said. "Fatalism—I don't go for it."

Kagame said that war is much simpler than peace, and that he sometimes wished he had another war to fight, but in the last months of 2008 the international press began reporting that he in fact was basically fighting another war. The trouble, once more, was in eastern Congo. In 2002, Kagame had agreed to withdraw his Army from Congo in exchange for a commitment from President Kabila to dismantle the F.D.L.R. But Kabila had done nothing to disband his genocidal allies, and before long a renegade Congolese Tutsi general named Laurent Nkunda had launched a new rebellion in North Kivu, claiming to protect Congolese Tutsis from the renewed threat of genocide.

That threat was real, and Rwanda's position was: What did anyone expect? For several years after Rwanda's withdrawal, Kagame regularly sent Emmanuel Ndahiro, his intelligence chief, to meet with Kabila and urge him to understand that as long as he supported the F.D.L.R. he was going to have a war in the east. Yet Kabila preferred to fight Nkunda rather than to negotiate a settlement with him.

Late last summer, Nkunda rebuffed a series of government attacks and went on the offensive, sweeping down from his stronghold in the highlands, routing the national Army with ease, and seizing new territory. The fighting had come, as always in Congo, at a terrible cost to noncombatants. There was slaughter, and pillage, and an epidemic of savage rape. Much of the horror came at the hands of Congolese government soldiers, who preferred to flee and go feral than to fight, and at the hands of the F.D.L.R. and other government-allied militias. But



"I've stopped carrying a briefcase. I don't like to flaunt my employment."

"I don't think this is doing me any good."

• •

Nkunda's men, too, were accused—and not for the first time—of perpetrating massacres and sex crimes; and as they captured territory last fall more than a quarter of a million civilians fled their homes in North Kivu, adding to the hundreds of thousands already displaced in eastern Congo. At the peak of the fighting, in late October, Nkunda's rebels were on the verge of overrunning the provincial capital, Goma. Then, suddenly, Nkunda called off his advance, and agreed to engage in negotiations with the government. Around the same time, his rhetoric shifted, and, instead of talking about ethnic self-defense, he claimed that he was waging a national-liberation struggle with the aim of regime change. The story caught on in the press that Rwanda and Congo were engaged in a proxy war.

So it was with some astonishment that I learned, as soon as I arrived in Rwanda in January, that Kagame and Kabila had been in regular phone contact for months, while exchanging high-level military and diplomatic delegations, and that the two Presidents had reached an agreement to conduct a joint military operation against the F.D.L.R. in Congo. The Rwandan officials I spoke with seemed in high spirits, which was not their usual style, especially when it came to the wars in Congo. But what about Nkunda? "The only thing we have in common with Nkunda is that he fights the F.D.L.R. Period. Nothing else," Ndahiro told me, and he added, "We don't supply uniforms, we don't supply ammunition, we don't supply food, we don't supply anything. The only thing we do for Nkunda, which I must admit—whether it is me or the President—is we say Nkunda has reasons."

Kagame went further. He said that of course he was happy that someone else was fighting the F.D.L.R.—that was a good cause—but he said that he had never met Nkunda, and had never spoken to him, or even seen him, except on television. For that, he had his military-intelligence officers, and he said, "No question about it, day in, day out, we know what is going on." He said that the only time he had sent Nkunda a message directly—through his minions, but in his own name—he had done so at the behest of President Kabila. That was when Nkunda was about to march into Goma, and Kagame said that Kabila had called him pleading for help. Kagame's message to Nkunda was: Stop. "You will completely lose the justness of your cause." Nkunda wasn't happy about that. "He's gone on talking about blaming us for that," Kagame said. He called Nkunda "irrational" and "high-handed" and "undisciplined," and he accused him of "behaving like a warlord." He did not deny that he had sympathy for Nkunda's cause. But Kagame was plainly disgusted by the fact that Nkunda—who loved to pose for press cameras in flamboyant costumes, wearing a white robe, or carrying a cane crowned with a silver eagle's head while sporting a "Rebels for Christ" lapel pin, or leading a snow-white pet lamb named Bettie around on a leash—had made the war in North Kivu so much about himself.

Kagame said that, when he agreed to help Kabila by telling Nkunda to back off from Goma, he knew that Kabila would blame him for controlling Nkunda. The blame was annoying—some European governments had cut aid to Rwanda—but what really angered Kagame was the assumption underlying that blame, that Nkunda was the big problem in eastern Congo. No, he said, the problem was that a pack of *génocidaires* was running loose in Congo, and nobody there wanted to deal with them. The problem was the F.D.L.R., and, Kagame said, Nkunda was just a symptom of that problem, because if you got rid of the F.D.L.R. he'd have no reason to exist, whereas if you got rid of him, and the F.D.L.R. remained, someone would arise to take his place.

By the same logic, Kagame argued, the F.D.L.R. was really a symptom of Kabila's weakness, because it would be nothing without his backing. This was what he had spent the last months of last year trying to explain to Kabila. Kagame said that he didn't want another war in Congo. Rwanda had paid a heavy price in international opinion for its part in the wars there, but Kagame had always depicted those wars as the price that had to be paid for reconciliation at home. And now he wanted to forge an alliance with Kabila, at precisely the moment when it appeared that they were at each other's throats. "That's why we are not so much focussed on the F.D.L.R. per se," he said. "In fact, our view is that by relating to Kinshasa well we eliminate the F.D.L.R. problem. Our approach is not just, Go for the F.D.L.R.—hit, hit, hit, you know. That time is gone."

What Kagame was seeking was not so much a military solution as a political realignment. During Rwanda's extended occupation of the mineral-rich eastern Congo, he had been accused of running a colonial war of pillage, but he had always said that Rwanda's economic well-being required peace and trade with its neighbors. Nkunda, he allowed, had been useful insofar as he had placed enormous pressure on Kabila "to feel that associating with us is much better and more profitable than associating with the F.D.L.R." But now that the two Presidents were working together, Nkunda suddenly seemed like the sideshow that Kagame had always said he was. To complicate matters, on January 5th Nkunda's second-in-command issued a statement announcing that Nkunda had been removed as the leader of his rebellion. The talk in Kigali was of a coup, but Nkunda was denying it. When I saw Kagame two days later, he seemed quite certain that it was true—Nkunda was being sidelined—and he seemed to think it was for the best. According to his intelligence, he said, Nkunda was the loser, "even if he may continue to exist." As for the joint Rwandan-Congolese campaign against the F.D.L.R., Kagame said, the battlefield results were not as important as the fact that the two countries had joined forces against their respective rebel threats. "So they benefit and we benefit," he said, and he added, "They have much to offer, we have much to offer, and this can only best be realized through business."

I wondered how Nkunda saw the situation. So one morning in the second week of January I travelled north out of Rwanda into Uganda, then west into a rebel-controlled zone of Congo, and onward, following a series of increasingly rough dirt tracks that ran through the bush of North Kivu province, slicing occasionally through tiny war-deserted villages, until the road came to an end at the base of a steep hill. I continued on foot to the top, where, in a cluster of tents and the concrete shell of an unfinished house, Nkunda had his field headquarters.

Nkunda was wearing an immaculate white Adidas tracksuit with black piping, matching sneakers, and a baseball cap inscribed with the legend "Survivors Never Surrender." He assured me that he was still in command of his movement. I had no way of knowing if he really believed that, much less if it was true. I asked him what he was fighting for, and he spoke for nearly two hours about everything that is wrong with Congo, a subject that might easily have engrossed us for two years. He spoke of the weakness of the central government, the need for an opposition party, the desirability of a federal system that would respect minority rights. He was clear and convincing, but he never managed to tell me what he meant to do about any of these things. He said that it was good to resist and to fight, and when at last I thanked him for his time, and said I had to be going—my driver wanted to get out of Congo well before dark—he looked offended. He had more to say, he told me, and what he said was this:

"There is one thing that gives me courage in life. I was in Rwanda during the genocide. I saw what Rwanda was during the genocide. And after the genocide I saw Kagame come to power. He was still young. I saw the challenges that lay before him, and today when I see what Rwanda has become I say, It's possible. It's possible. Me, I have no more that I fear—I fear only what is inside a man. Man is not destroyed from the exterior. Man is destroyed from within. Because if there was ever destruction in the world it was the destruction of Rwanda—where the country was empty, the banks were emptied, the Army had fled, the people had fled, all the infrastructure gone. But the Rwanda of today, I don't know if it is a miracle or what—but there is a man. A single man. The Rwandans are still the same—and without Kagame the genocide could come back. Perhaps the Tutsis would even avenge themselves against the Hutus."

And he went on: "Rwanda has no resources. And Congo with all this, why has it not developed? Why not? Why not? Because there is not a man." He said, "In Rwanda there is no petrol, but in Congo there is. In Rwanda there are no diamonds; in Congo there is. In Rwanda there is not this fertility—only in a little part of it—but in Congo it is everywhere. In Rwanda there's only a little forest, but in Congo there is the greatest forest in Africa, in the world. Why hasn't this country developed? Listen, Congo gives electricity to Rwanda. In Rwanda there are no blackouts, but in Congo it's black. What's happening? There's a man. Just one. There aren't two."

He thought about that for a moment, and then he wound up where he had started: "I have participated in the destruction of Rwanda and I have seen the reconstruction of Rwanda, and I tell you I still don't understand how that man did it."

Two weeks later, on the second day of the joint Rwandan-Congolese military operation against the F.D.L.R., Kagame's troops arrested Nkunda. Rwandan officials say that they are considering whether to turn him over to the Congolese, but they do not seem to feel any urgency about it. "Nkunda, if you will, is our guest," Kagame told the BBC. In the meantime, Nkunda's army has disbanded and many of his troops have been integrated into the Congolese military.

Nkunda's arrest heightened the drama of the return of Rwandan soldiers to Congo. There had been great alarm about the operation among human-rights activists and Western diplomats, who predicted mass civilian casualties and displacement—as if that weren't the status quo that the operation was trying to change. There was great skepticism, too, that the Rwandans would ever leave Congo when the Congolese asked them. But everybody was on his best behavior. The anticipated bad news never came. Some F.D.L.R. fighters were killed, and about seven hundred took the occasion to return home and demobilize along with a thousand of their civilian followers. The operation lasted a little more than a month, and, on a day that had been agreed upon in advance, the Rwandan troops lined up at the border to bid farewell to their Congolese counterparts. They were given a festive sendoff, and a festive welcome home.

Since the withdrawal of the Rwandan Army, the F.D.L.R. has gone on a rampage, killing and raping Congolese and causing them to flee their homes. And there are still countless other armed bands tearing up what is left of eastern Congo. There are also still about fifty thousand Congolese Tutsi refugees in Rwanda, where they have been since 1996, when the *génocidaires* in the camps chased them there. At the news of Nkunda's arrest, these refugees staged angry demonstrations, and the police were sent in to quell them. There is still no peace in Congo. But Kagame has finally rewritten the script in the way he had wanted to since he came to power—the way he had tried to rewrite it when he installed Kabila's father in the first place, all those bloody years ago—and for the first time in fifteen years there is near-universal agreement that there is a possibility of peace. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
Philip Gourevitch talks about Rwanda.

LETTER FROM WASHINGTON

MONEY TALKS

Can Peter Orszag keep the President's political goals economically viable?

BY RYAN LIZZA

A few weeks ago, Peter Orszag, President Obama's trim, apple-cheeked budget director, stretched out in the green room of what has become, in recent years, the locus of reliably liberal sensibility in this country—the midtown studios where Jon Stewart tapes "The Daily Show." Orszag's day had been a reflection of the Obama Administration's frenetic attempts to stave off worldwide economic disaster—urgent phone calls, BlackBerry messages, meetings with the editorial boards of the *Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, lunch with Mayor Bloomberg, constant communications about wavering members of Congress preparing to vote for (or against) Obama's budget—yet Orszag remained well pressed, in a dark pin-striped suit and black cowboy boots. After a while, he spotted a gift bag on the coffee table nearby. Orszag's girlfriend, Claire Milonas, and his communications director, Kenneth Baer, joked about whether the free hat and Irish liqueur inside complied with White House ethics rules banning gifts that cost more than twenty dollars. "I bet this only retails for twelve," Baer said, pointing to a "Daily Show" T-shirt.

Stewart appeared in the doorway, and Orszag sprang from his chair to greet him. Stewart had been reviewing his guest's bulletproof résumé: Exeter, Princeton, the London School of Economics, the Clinton White House, the Congressional Budget Office, Obama's Cabinet. He craned his neck as if searching for hawks in a redwood. Orszag is six-two. Stewart is not.

"You're *way* taller than you're supposed to be," Stewart said. "I've been reading all these articles about you. They're making me feel like shit. The doctorate in economics, and the jogging, and you're six years younger than me, and now you're fucking taller, too. I don't care for this. It is not right."

Orszag is also way younger than he should be. He turned forty in December—making him the youngest member of a young Cabinet. As director of the Office of Management and Budget, he is occupied with conceiving, drafting, selling, and passing the President's budget. And he is doing this while his colleagues Timothy Geithner and Lawrence Summers, the Treasury Secretary and the director of the National Economic Council, are charged with rescuing the national banking system and the automobile industry.

Aides who thought that they were coming to Washington to achieve universal health insurance, rescue inner-city schools, or save the planet from global warming tend to view the Administration's work on the financial system as a black hole threatening to swallow the real Obama agenda, with all its Rooseveltian ambition—an agenda crafted in the pre-crisis innocence of the early Presidential campaign. This agenda is stubbornly expressed in exquisite detail in the President's budget, which Orszag released on February 26th. Unlike buying toxic assets, bailing out insurance and automobile companies, and the rest of the economic-crisis management that has dominated the first months of the new Administration, the budget is a reminder of why Obama ran for President. That makes Peter Orszag more than just the budget director. He is the unlikely guardian of Obamaism itself.

In the green room, Orszag was trying to get this message across to Stewart, who kept up his routine while feigning stupidity, all the while sneaking in well-informed questions.

"This has nothing to do with the budget—it's this thing that I can't get out of my head," Stewart said. "With all that bailout stuff, why are they bailing out the banks?" Why not the borrowers? He went on, "These mortgages went bad, and then they were securitized, and *blah blah blah*. So that's all there." He held up a hand to represent mortgages. "So why not fix the mortgages, not the securities?" He made a circle in the air to represent securitized loans.

"Well, they're doing that," Orszag said.

"But it's small," Stewart said, noting that Obama's mortgage-assistance program is tiny compared to the bank bailouts.

"Even if you just fix that"—Orszag pointed to Stewart's hand—"you still need banks to lend to businesses."

"But wouldn't they, if you pay this?" Stewart waved his hand, rolling it into a fist.

"Not entirely."

"Really? Why?"

"Paying all that would be even more expensive."

"The hand?"

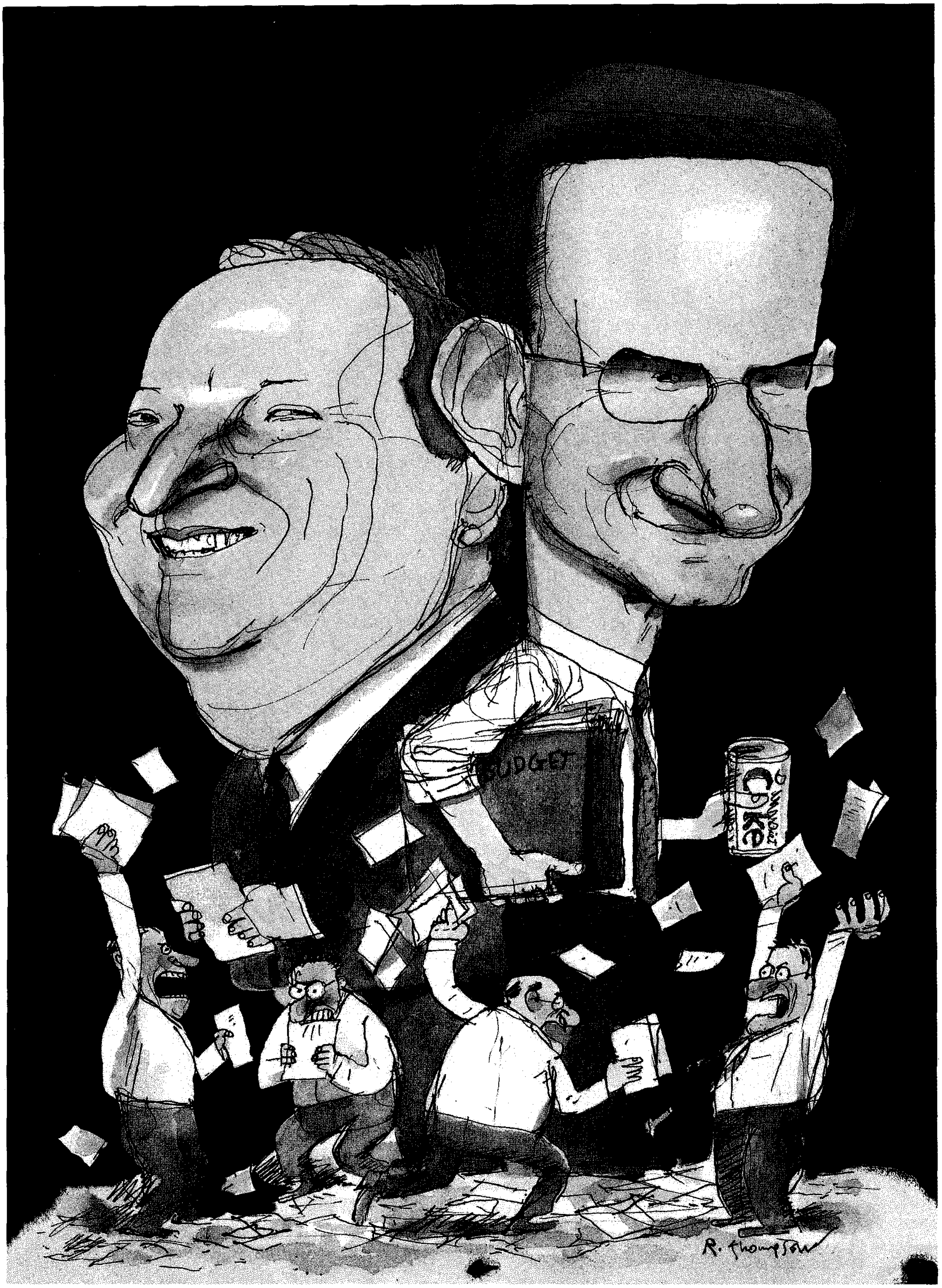
"The hand."

Stewart was not satisfied. "Is it hard to talk to someone who doesn't know what the hell he's talking about?" he said. "Because I'm watching you calculate, like, 'Am I gonna go second grade on this guy? Do I have to go seventh grade on this guy? How do I do this?' " He asked Orszag why the government didn't just bail out borrowers who have defaulted. "The problem is, if you just focussed on the people who defaulted you create this huge incentive to default," Orszag replied. Stewart looked at Orszag with an astonished grin. Before Stewart could finish pointing out that the government is creating an equally huge incentive by bailing out the financial firms Orszag realized that he had been backed into a corner: "Yeah, none of this is perfect!"

Stewart responded with high-pitched laughter, seeming to suggest that if Obama's budget director doesn't know the answer to these questions we are all doomed.

Orszag shrugged. "You know what? It's good that I'm just the budget guy." He added, more seriously, "I have to be more constrained, because it really is

RICHARD THOMPSON


BUDGET
Coke
R. Thompson

Orszag can match Lawrence Summers in policy expertise, and has proved to be a subtle and persistent political player.

Geithner's—so the more we talk budget the more free I can be."

"He's the bailout guy?"

"He's the bailout guy," Orszag said with a smile. "He gets sensitive about that."

Orszag's colleagues characterize him as something of a policy Eagle Scout, always prepared. For two months, I watched and listened to him interact with dozens of reporters—in conference calls, press breakfasts, live TV appearances from the White House—and I have interviewed him half a dozen times this year. His exchange with Stewart was the first time I saw him at a loss. After Stewart left the room, Orszag slumped on a couch and replayed the conversation. "I don't know that I'm totally comfortable saying why are we not just helping the mortgages," he said anxiously.

"I don't think he's going to ask more than two questions on it, so you'll be fine," Baer said.

"You're going to have a lot of fun—he completely and totally likes you," Milonas added.

Orszag tried rehearsing a better response until he had crafted something that satisfied him. "The problem originated with mortgages, but it's now spread well beyond," he said, "so that even if you go back to the original problem it's not like you're—" He started again: "Say you initially got sick from something but then the illness is throughout your whole body." He sounded more excited. "The infection has spread throughout your whole body! You can't just go back and fix the hole in your arm. That's the better answer."

Orszag's Washington office once belonged to the Secretary of War. It is a vast and stately room on the second floor of the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. The E.E.O.B., which is next to the White House and serves as the workplace for most of the President's staff, is a gray monstrosity of cast iron, granite, and slate, built in the French Second Empire style. As soon as the building was completed, in 1888, it was considered by some to be a national embarrassment.

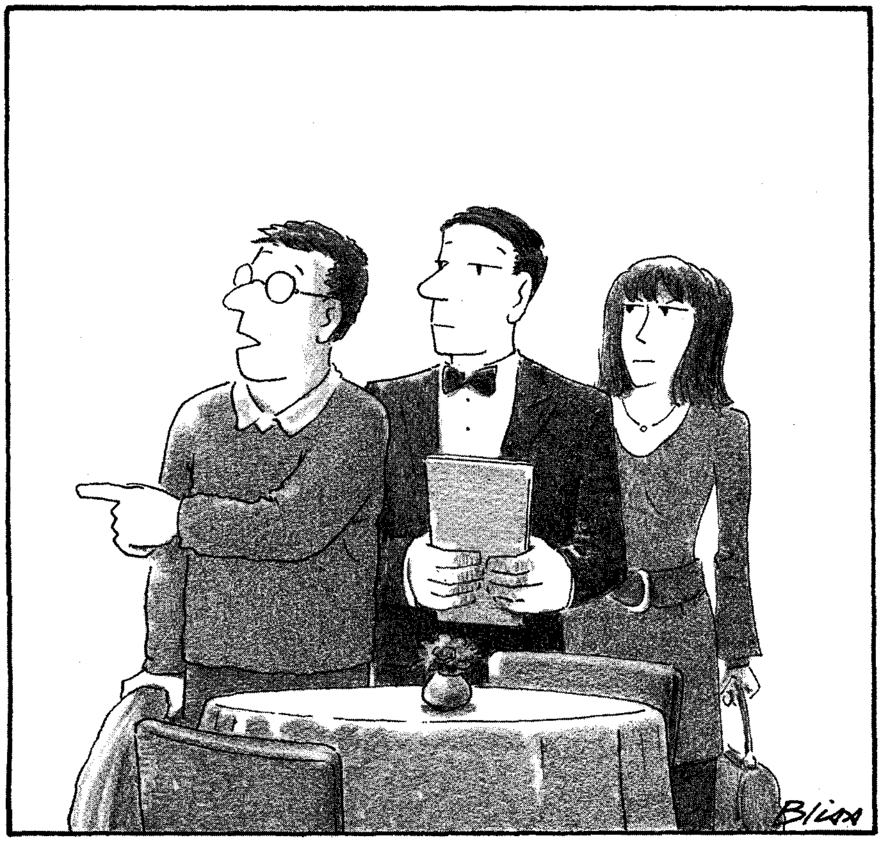
In his first week at work, Peter Orszag almost set the building ablaze. Standing before the fireplace in his office recently, he recalled the January day when he lit a fire, unaware that the chimney had been sealed. Smoke billowed into an office on the fourth floor, setting off alarms, and the building was evacuated.

Orszag said that he had been encouraged by the presence of logs and fire tools and suggested, without much conviction, that he might have been the victim of a prank, similar to the one perpetrated by Clinton aides who pried the letter "W" off the computer keyboards of incoming Bush staffers in 2001. "The firefighters were, like, 'You know, you guys, the Clinton Administration removed the 'W's.' I'm just saying." On the floor of the private balcony outside his office he also found a pile of cigarette butts and, in a planter, stubbed-out cigars.

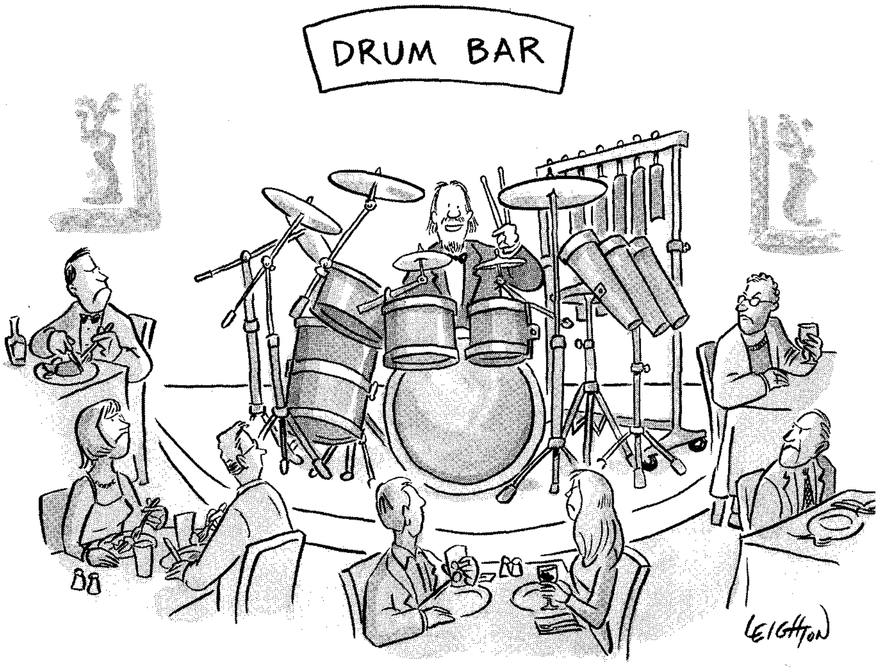
The flotilla of butts on the balcony, as it turned out, was not much more unsightly than the state of the economy left behind by the Bush Administration. Obama inherited a haywire banking system, plummeting employment, a pandemic of housing foreclosures, and a deficit of more than a trillion dollars—an amount that has risen steadily in the months since.

Obama appointed Orszag and the O.M.B.'s deputy director, Robert Nabors, a veteran of both the O.M.B. and congressional staffs, just before the Thanksgiving holiday. Orszag called Nabors that weekend and told him that they needed to have a budget meeting the following Monday. At an office building on Sixth Street, Obama's economic team and the rest of the transition group worked in cramped conditions that tended to flatten the hierarchy that became more apparent when the team members scattered to their respective power centers in the West Wing, the E.E.O.B., and the Treasury Department. For two months, Orszag, Nabors, Geithner, Summers, Jason Furman, Melody Barnes, Austan Goolsbee, and several others worked within inches of one other—a combustible mixture of personalities and economic philosophies. In early January, Obama moved into an office two doors down the hall.

The initial discussions were highly abstract. The first Obama budget, Nabors told me, "was being designed with an eye toward what do we need to do to put the economy back on a more sustainable path? What do we need for economic growth? And what do we need to do in order to transform the country? Those were our overarching principles." The budgeteers took a hyper-rational approach, attempting to determine policy and leave the politics and spin for



"What's wrong with that quiet little table for two in front of the Rangers game?"



"Any requests?"

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later. He went on, "One of the things that would probably surprise people is that this wasn't an effort where anybody created a top-line budget number and said, 'This is the number that we have to hit, and that's just that, and we'll fit everything else in.' Or, 'We can't go higher than *x* on revenue,' or, 'We can't go higher than *y* on spending.' It was more of a functional budget than anything else: 'This is what we need to do. These are our principles. These are our core beliefs. And as a result this is what our budget looks like.'"

Nabors compared the process favorably to his experience on Capitol Hill, saying, "One of the things that was really surprising to me is the amount of value that was put into analytics and academics, and thinking constructively about a project. I'm not saying that people completely ignored the Hill reaction or the public reaction, but we began with: 'This is what smart people are saying about this, and this is why.'"

Orszag and Summers were the dominant voices in the process. On some issues, they were viewed as like-minded, a pair of Scrooges concerned with deficits and more hesitant to embrace expensive programs. A senior White House official talked of an N.E.C./O.M.B. "axis." According to some, though, this two-headed beast was occasionally at war with itself. One sign of the uneasy relationship came before an early budget meeting, when the staffs of the two men, an Administration official said, competed for the seat directly across from Obama, the spot reserved for the lead official in the policy area under discussion. The coveted seat was given to Orszag. Summers sat next to the President, which, according to White House protocol, meant that he was attending the meeting in his role as head of the N.E.C., not as the leader of the budget process.

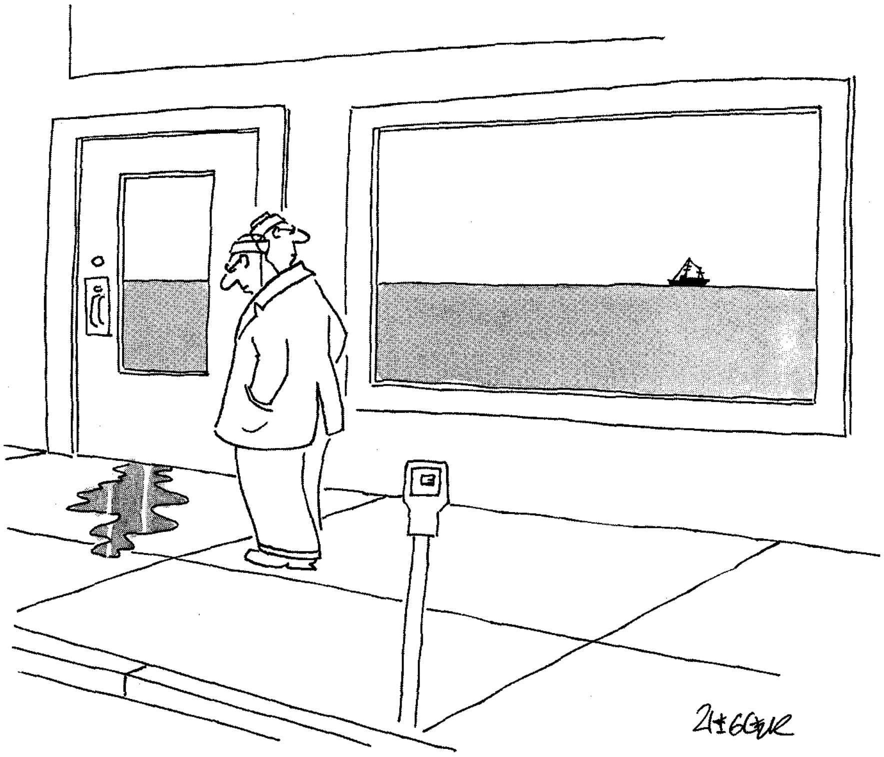
Summers is a brilliant yet heroically self-regarding economist. His capacity for equations is not matched by a capacity for working easily with others. When I asked the senior White House official about the relationship between him and Orszag, he replied, "There's a little turbulence between Larry and everybody, because that's just the way he is."

In the Administration, Summers has tried to hold potential intellectual rivals at bay. He reportedly restricted the influence of Paul Volcker, the former Federal Reserve chairman, who leads Obama's economic-recovery advisory board. (A spokesperson for Summers denied that.) But Orszag, a mid-level economist in the late Clinton Administration when Summers was Deputy Treasury Secretary, was someone who could keep up with him in policy expertise, and who proved to be a subtle and persistent political player. Unlike Summers, Orszag is not especially confrontational. He sometimes leaves advisers on opposite sides of an issue with a sense that he has supported their view—a distinctly Obamian quality. It was Orszag, drawing on his Hill connections, who helped Rahm Emanuel, the President's chief of staff, and Obama close the stimulus deal with Congress in February. Harry Reid, the Senate Majority Leader, recently said he was so impressed that he called Orszag to tell him that though "he is not a longtime person involved in politics, he is a natural."

Orszag has turned the O.M.B. into something of a behavioral-economics think tank. Behaviorists reject the classic economic theory of human beings as ultra-rational self-interested actors and, drawing on psychology, examine the causes of seemingly irrational economic choices, such as not taking advantage of money offered in an employer-provided retirement plan or giving away more money to charity than can be explained by purely selfish motives. Cass Sunstein, the University of Chicago legal scholar, who is the co-author, with Richard Thaler, of "Nudge," a book about how policymakers can harness insights from behavioral economics, and Jeffrey Liebman, a behavioral economist from Harvard, both work for Orszag. Last month, Liebman brought three leading behaviorists to the White House to advise Obama's health-care-policy team.

The budget debate began during the transition, with a discussion of the deficit. In January, the 2009 deficit—the difference between government revenues and expenses for the year—was estimated to be $1.2 trillion. "What exactly is our goal with regard to deficit reduction?" Nabors said, describing the first debate. "Very early on, people were recognizing that a balanced budget is not something that is fiscally conceivable without fundamentally just deconstructing the federal government. It can't happen. Things are too far gone."

Aides during Clinton's first term held similar debates about deficit reduction, and Clinton sacrificed many of his campaign promises to reduce the deficits that he inherited from George H. W. Bush.



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But in 1993 the economy was recovering from a relatively modest recession, and Clinton concluded that it would benefit from smaller deficits, which could keep both inflation and long-term interest rates low. Obama faced an economy in serious recession, already low interest rates, fears of deflation, and consensus among his aides (and some Republicans) that, in the short term, deficits would have to rise in order to stimulate the economy. However, White House officials disagreed about what constituted a tolerable level of deficit spending in the long term. Summers seemed to be most concerned about deficits; aides like Carol Browner, who is in charge of energy policy, and Melody Barnes, the head of the Domestic Policy Council, were less alarmed. "They don't come from a background where the deficit numbers are necessarily the first thing that they think about," a senior Administration official said.

There was also pressure from Congress. The respective heads of the House and Senate Budget Committees, John Spratt, Jr., of South Carolina, and Kent Conrad, of North Dakota, have spent years trying to control the deficit. They pushed Obama for a streamlined agenda that would gradually reduce it over the next ten years. "One of the things I had said to Peter Orszag is we know you can't get to balance in five years," Spratt told me. "We doubt that you can get to zero in ten years, but at least keep the path going at a reasonable pace downward toward that goal."

Inside the White House, the concern about deficits was matched by the pressure to fund major initiatives such as universal health care, energy independence, and expanded access to college. In the end, the budget team decided to cut the deficit in half by the end of Obama's first term, but, instead of mandating that it would continue to decline thereafter, as Spratt had demanded, promised that it would not rise above three per cent of G.D.P. In other words, Obama's budget assumes that, even after the recession passes, the government can live with deficits indefinitely. Obama could (and probably will) revisit this decision, but for now it represents a dramatic break with Clinton-era orthodoxy.

The deficit spectre has loomed over every major debate. The most contentious issue has been health care. The Administration was divided into three camps. According to White House officials, a group including Vice-President Biden and David Axelrod, a senior adviser, and led by Summers was hesitant to make a major push on health care this year, especially given the fact that a full plan would cost roughly a trillion dollars over ten years. Then, there was Tom Daschle, the former South Dakota senator who was Obama's original choice to lead the health-care-reform team, and his staff at the White House and at the Department of Health and Human Services. In January, Daschle became alarmed that health care would be either absent from the Obama budget or not given the emphasis that Obama had promised. (When Daschle went to see Rahm Emanuel to register these concerns, the President, who had been quiet during the early health-care meetings, stopped by and reassured Daschle of his commitment.) Orszag came to the debate with a third option, which combined Summers's concern about deficits and Daschle's insistence that Obama tackle health care this year. He argued that health-care reform *is* deficit reduction.

Orszag is convinced that rising federal health-care costs are the most important cause of long-term deficits. As a fellow at the Brookings Institution, he became obsessed with the findings of a research team at Dartmouth showing that some regions of the country spend far more money on health care than others but that patients in those high-spending areas don't have better outcomes than those in regions that spend less money. If spending more on health care has no correlation with making people healthier, then there must be enormous savings that a smart government, by determining precisely which medical procedures are worth financing and which are not, could wring out of the system. "I spent several months in very intense study," Orszag told me. "The reason that I wanted to go to C.B.O. was I thought that was one of the key bodies that could really delve into what we could do about it."

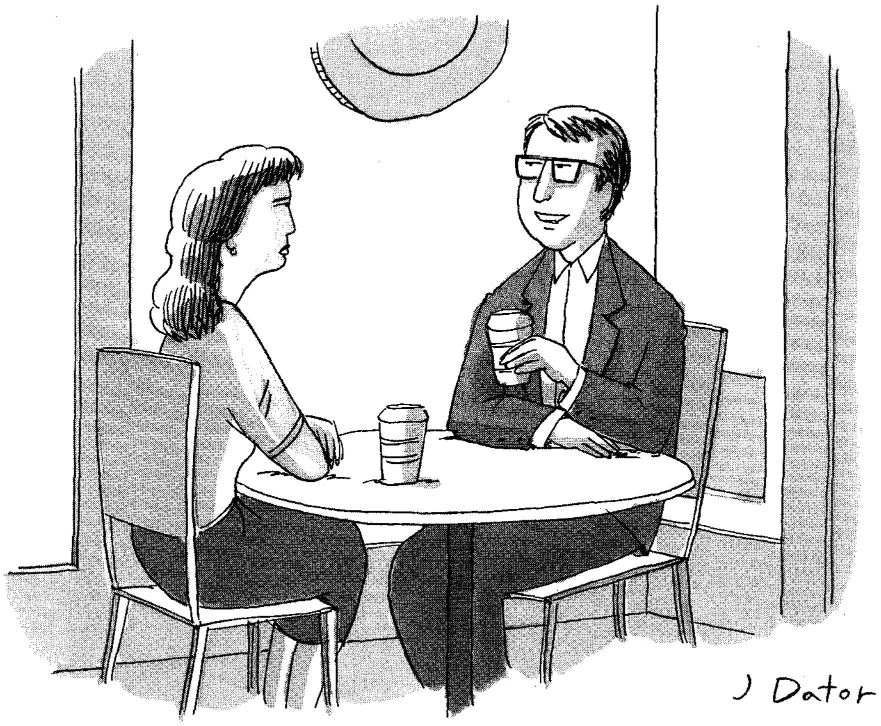
During the 2008 primaries, Obama had tried to draw a contrast between himself and Hillary Clinton on the issue of health care by emphasizing reduction of costs rather than just expansion of coverage. Days after Obama nominated him as director of O.M.B., Orszag met with Daschle at Daschle's law offices to discuss health-care savings. Orszag believed that the ideas put forward by the Obama campaign were unproved. In budget jargon, they "wouldn't score." While at the C.B.O., he produced the book that Congress uses to estimate the cost of various health-care ideas. Orszag's inside knowledge of the arcane congressional budgeting process seemed to give him an advantage over other White House advisers. With the budget gimmickry of the campaign cast aside, Orszag pushed for aggressive cuts in Medicare and Medicaid, which, he argued, would show Congress that Obama was serious about controlling long-term costs. After February 3rd, when Daschle withdrew his nomination, because he had failed to pay some taxes, Orszag became perhaps the dominant voice on health care within the White House. At the core of both the stimulus bill and the Obama budget is Orszag's belief that a government empowered with research on the most effective medical treatments can, using the proper incentives, persuade doctors to become more efficient health-care providers, thus saving billions of dollars. Obama is in effect betting his Presidency on Orszag's thesis.

Orszag was proud that, despite the worsening deficit projections, he had helped to write a budget that broke with Obama's campaign pledges in only three significant ways. During the campaign, Obama promised that he would use money from the expiration of Bush's upper-income tax cuts, in 2010, to pay for an expansion of health insurance. Orszag insisted that this idea would have to be sacrificed to the demands of congressional budget rules and fiscal conservatives who want the revenue from the expiring tax cuts to pay for deficit reduction. (This decision, which other Obama aides fought right to the end, forced Obama to find a new source of funding for health care, and he settled on a controversial plan to reduce the value of tax deductions for high-income earners.) Obama also wanted to make permanent the middle-class tax cuts enacted in the stimulus bill, which would cost more than five hundred billion dollars over ten years. But Orszag and his team had run out of money, so they devised a convoluted compromise: they would use the revenue raised from Obama's proposal to charge companies that emit too much carbon—the so-called cap-and-trade plan—to pay for his beloved tax cuts, a central campaign pledge known as Making Work Pay. Finally, some of Obama's spending promises, such as a commitment to increase foreign aid, were scaled back or stretched over longer periods of time.

During the final budget meeting, Orszag and several colleagues arrived in the West Wing wearing multicolored hats with propellers on top, a reference to Obama's nickname for Orszag and his fellow-wonks: the propeller heads. The propeller-head image and the academic credentials of Obama's economic advisers have given them a reputation as theorists ungrounded in political realities. Obama's economic team, Frank Rich wrote in the *Times* in December, "evokes trace memories of our dark best-and-brightest past." In April, the syndicated columnist Michael Barone, taking aim at the President's major budget proposals, wrote, "Beware of geeks bearing formulas." This criticism could yet prove true, but Obama was similarly caricatured, during the campaign, as the "professorial" constitutional-law instructor by way of Harvard and the University of Chicago—the "cool academic" who could never defeat Hillary Clinton or John McCain.

Orszag, despite his image as a number-crunching technocrat, considers himself an activist. He has always been interested in the intersection of economics and politics, rather than in economics as a purely academic or ideological pursuit. As a high-school student at Exeter, when all his political friends wanted to intern for the liberal hero Ted Kennedy, Orszag went to work for a far less glamorous figure—Tom Daschle. While his friends spent their time answering phones, he was writing Daschle's speeches. At Princeton, he wrote his senior thesis on the relationship between the Federal Reserve and Congress. One of his conclusions was that "it is clear that Congress suffers from a lack of understanding of even the most rudimentary economics." Orszag's paper won an award for the best thesis that year in international economics or politics. After receiving his master's from the London School of Economics, he spent a year in post-Soviet Russia as an economist working for Richard Layard, of the L.S.E. (Orszag later returned to the L.S.E. and received his Ph.D. in 1997.)

"It was the most important thing going on in the world," Layard told me recently, glossing over the often disastrous results achieved in Russia by the invasion of Western economists. Layard said that Orszag was responsible for creating a simple diagram that demonstrated the relationship between Russia's monetary policy—which at the time meant printing more and more money—and hyperinflation. The diagram, shown to Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, Layard recalled, persuaded Chernomyrdin to shift policy. "You can imagine those two lines going along in parallel with each other," Layard said. "When you show that to a prime minister, it can make quite an



"Enough about me, but nothing about you just yet."

impact if he's worried about inflation." Referring to Orszag, Layard added, "I'm sure he's doing similar things where he is now."

Layard was right. At the Congressional Budget Office, Orszag hired specialists in health-care economics and turned the institution into a clearinghouse of information about rising health-care costs. When I asked him whether he was an advocate for policies at a place that was supposed to be nonpartisan, he replied, "I would say I was activist."

Orszag cited his mentor and friend Joseph Stiglitz, the Nobel-laureate economist, as an example of someone who is "more of a thinker and an academic than an implementer." In 1993, Orszag and Stiglitz, who was then a member of the Council of Economic Advisers, attended a meeting to discuss how the Clinton Administration should respond to Norway's announcement that it would resume commercial whaling, which meant killing minke whales. U.S. law allowed the government to retaliate economically against Norway—a country that had just helped negotiate a Middle East peace accord, and which was to host the Winter Olympics the following year.

According to Orszag, Stiglitz said, "As an economist, I object to imposing trade restrictions, especially against a country that just brokered this Arab-Israeli peace deal. I have an alternative proposal: how about if we boycott the Norwegian Olympics?" Orszag continued, "The Secretary of State"—Warren Christopher—"turned to him and said, 'Joe, do you realize that you're equating the killing of four minke whales with the invasion of Afghanistan?' He kind of leaned back in his chair and he puts a pencil in his ear. He said, 'You know, you're right. How about if we calibrate the boycott and only skip those events that we normally lose anyway? Like the one with the skis and the gun. We always lose that.' "

Kent Conrad, the chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, has made eradicating the federal budget deficit his life's work. He told me that he picked Orszag to run the C.B.O. in 2007, and repeatedly asked him to testify before his committee, because they shared a concern about long-term spending trends. As Orszag helped draft Obama's budget, he tried to anticipate Conrad's objections, sometimes countering opponents' ideas with his knowledge of how Conrad would react. On Monday, March 16th, he and Conrad met for lunch in Conrad's Senate office. Over the weekend, Conrad had learned that the C.B.O. was preparing a report showing that, even with no change in policies, government deficits would be $1.6 trillion more than the Administration was projecting over the next ten years. In Conrad's view, the new numbers meant that Obama's budget, which was released on February 26th, needed drastic revision. He reviewed the document with Orszag issue by issue, rejecting some proposals worth billions of dollars, and explaining that the budget resolution could not pass the Senate as written. Obama's ambitious spending plans would have to be pared down. For instance, Obama had asked for seven hundred and fifty billion dollars more for the Troubled Asset Relief Program, which funds the bank bailouts. Conrad said that it was politically untenable.

Other Obama proposals encountered resistance from parochial interests in the Senate. Some Democrats disliked the Administration's idea of raising taxes for health care by scaling back the value of tax deductions. The resolution could not even mention the words "cap and trade," because they had caused a revolt among Democratic senators sensitive to the interests of oil, coal, and natural-gas companies.

"I told him at that meeting that, after talking to colleagues, it was clear to me that 'cap and trade,' if it was included as the President did it, we would have a very difficult time passing a budget resolution," Conrad said.

Pell grants, financial aid for low-income college students, are currently paid for by a combination of discretionary funds, meaning that Congress decides how much money is spent each year; and mandatory funds, meaning that a government formula determines how much is spent. Obama wanted to pay for all Pell grants with mandatory funds, in order to create a steady revenue stream for the program. Conrad explained that Senate appropriators consider the conversion of a discretionary program to a mandatory one to be a usurpation of their power by the executive branch. So that idea was out. Obama had also proposed reducing agricultural subsidies to farmers with sales of more than half a million dollars a year, a notion that farm-state senators like Conrad, who have disproportionate influence on the Budget and Finance Committees, rejected.

The following day, March 17th, Conrad and his House counterpart, John Spratt, presented their grievances to the President at the White House. They met in the Vice-President's Ceremonial Office, a room with multicolored ornamental stencilling on the walls, gold chandeliers, and two black marble fireplaces. According to Spratt, when Obama arrived he said, "My Lord, whose room is this? I've never seen this room before." Somebody told him that it was Biden's office. "Well, this is better than anything I've got," he said.

Conrad said that he and Spratt told the President that "the budget was simply going to have to change. We could not write a budget that was the same as his given the fact that we had almost two trillion dollars less in revenue." Conrad said that Obama was "calm and analytical." He continued, "This wasn't welcome news, but he understood the implications immediately. His basic message was: Preserve my priorities to the extent you can—reducing dependence on foreign energy, excellence in education, health-care reform. And he made the case for each one." Conrad, who recently got a bichon frise—which, he said, was in his lap as we talked on the phone—told me that he also gave the new President a piece of old advice: "In Washington, you need a friend, get a dog."

A week later, on March 25th, Orszag was in his office with Kenneth Baer, his communications director, preparing for a conference call with more than a hundred reporters. At the White House, the intellectual debates of conceiving and writing the budget had given way to the realities of campaigning for it. The mood at O.M.B. was grim. The C.B.O. had released its numbers and was projecting that Obama's budget would mean a deficit of $2.3 trillion more over ten years than the Administration was predicting. Even worse, its assessment of Obama's budget indicated that the Administration would violate its self-imposed deficit

FORGOTTEN FOUNTAIN

Water dripping year after year
from the green mossed crevice in the east cliff
through my absences and through winter
through the shadows after midday
as they deepened to nightfall
the clear drops arriving through the stone
with no color of their own as they
appear one by one on the threshold
of the world in its full color
and each one pauses for a moment
before starting on its way down
to itself as it has been doing
ever since the cliff rose
from the seafloor and then the bees found it
the badgers the foxes the birds
until the day came with voices
from the village to clear the slope
singing as the tools rose and fell
turning the stiff yellow soil to plant
vineyards and peaches and I stood
by the clear source once listening
to their last singing together
with the mattocks keeping time and I
thought of Édouard and the village
as it had been when he was young
and his name was called with the others
to the colors as they put it
in the language of elsewhere and of
what it felt like in those last days
to be leaving for Verdun with no words
in a moment with no color of its own

—*W. S. Merwin*

cap—three per cent of G.D.P.—every year through 2019, when the deficit would reach 5.7 per cent.

The previous evening, hours before Obama held a press conference to discuss the budget, Conrad held his own press conference, announcing *his* budget blueprint, which incorporated the changes he had outlined for Orszag and Obama in their private meetings. A headline on the front page of the Washington *Post* read, "DEMOCRATS TAKE KNIFE TO OBAMA'S BUDGET; BILLIONS TARGETED TO BRING DEFICITS DOWN."

Orszag and Baer rehearsed lines to use during the conference call to downplay the Democratic rebellion. "Nobody expects Congress to xerox our budget," Baer said, echoing a remark the President had made the previous evening. They thought they needed something fresher. After testing other phrases, Orszag said, "Let's do it that way." One of Orszag's assistants rushed through the office, holding a cell phone to his ear. "Just so we know when we're talking to the press today, what are the revenue numbers?" he said as he left the room.

Before the call began, Orszag's people settled around a long conference table. In front of Orszag were various budget documents, a Diet Coke, a Starbucks cup, and what looked like a Reagan-era microphone. In front of one of Orszag's aides was a piece of paper that said "Talking Points and Q&A, Senate Budget Chairman's Mark." Richard Kogan, the O.M.B.'s in-house expert on the budget process, reviewed Conrad's budget line by line and occasionally, when Orszag asked him a question, punched buttons on his calculator.

Orszag made an opening statement in which he praised the work of the budget committees and announced a new tax-reform commission that would recommend ideas for overhauling the system by the end of this year—a bit of news that would help distract from the emerging story line of Democratic disunity. He reviewed the alleged differences between Obama's and Congress's budgets, minimizing each one, and said slowly, "The resolutions may not be identical twins to what the President submitted, but they are certainly brothers that look an awful lot alike."

Everyone at the table looked up and smiled. The "twins" line appeared in dozens of news stories that week.

With the giddiness of a propeller head asked to the prom, Orszag told his staff that he had been invited to ride with the President to Capitol Hill to meet with Democratic senators for lunch, and after the conference call he was off. A few blocks from the lunch, the House Budget Committee was convening to vote on its version of Obama's budget. For a House committee meeting, the room was surprisingly crowded. Democratic dissension was still the story of the day. A wire reporter told a colleague, "My bureau chief is convinced that there is now a major civil war going on in the Democratic Party, and that Obama's visit to the Hill is about a lot more than the budget." Republicans on the committee were assailing both deficits and the spending proposals. John Campbell, of California, said that if spending in previous budgets was like having "a couple of drinks when you get home at night, this budget is falling down, throwing up, passing out wasted on spending and deficits." Jim Jordan, of Ohio, told a story about a baby born in his district that week to the Beck family; because of the long-term deficits, the Beck baby was already thirty thousand dollars in debt.

The ranking Republican on the committee is Paul Ryan, a thin and frenetic conservative from Wisconsin who was elected in 1998, at the age of twenty-eight. A week before the budget hearing, we met in his office and he laid out the Republican view of Obamanomics. He ate a sandwich as he spoke, and apologized if it seemed rude. "I have a fast metabolism, so I gotta keep eating," he said. Ryan said that he was encouraged by Obama's early economic appointments, including Summers and Orszag, whom he viewed as reasonable moderates. He was dismayed by the stimulus bill—too much spending, not enough tax cuts—but believed that it was mostly the product of liberals in Congress rather than the President. He was disappointed that Obama had signed a large spending bill with thousands of wasteful earmarks in it, but, he reasoned, it was legislation left over from the previous year, rather than something initiated by the new President.

Still, with each decision Ryan found it more difficult to believe that Obama would govern as a moderate consensus builder. In his telling, it wasn't until the release of the budget that the full extent of Obama's liberalism was revealed. "We expected a centrist approach to governing, and we got the biggest transformation of the federal government since the New Deal," he said. "The way I see it, it's sort of the third great progressive wave that he's seeking to achieve here. . . . You had the New Deal, which most Americans have sort of reconciled with and become kind of comfortable with. . . . Then you had the Great Society, and I think now you have the third great and final wave." He added, "This is a decision we're going to have to make in our country, whether or not we want to adopt more of a European model of government or whether we want to stick with the American project."

If there was one aspect of the President's budget that demonstrated Obama's European sympathies, Ryan said, it was health care. More specifically, it was Orszag's approach to curbing health-care costs. "He believes you need to set up this über-bureaucracy—the institute of comparative effectiveness—which we'll put smart people in, and they will design the metrics and the processes on how medicine is to be practiced," Ryan said. "And then the federal government will impose and enforce those processes. . . . It is precisely what they employ in England. It's precisely what they employ in Canada." Rather than celebrate Orszag's attempt to rein in health-care spending, Ryan seemed horrified by it.

After lunch with Obama and the Democratic senators, who, by most accounts, were muted in their criticism of the President's budget, Orszag returned to his office. From there, I walked with him to the White House driveway, where he moved from camera to camera, repeating lines from the morning's conference calls in a series of TV interviews. The conference-call spin session had been relatively successful, and there seemed to be no damaging leaks from the Senate lunch about infighting among Democrats. "Anything major happen since I've been gone?" Orszag asked Baer. "I think the tide has turned," Baer replied.

One of the points that Orszag made to the press that day was that the budget resolutions passed by the House and the Senate were only the beginning of a very long process. Most of the action on Obama's major legislative initiatives will take place later, outside the budget committees, whose real power is to set over-all levels of spending rather than dictate how the money is spent. But this early skirmish was instructive for Orszag and Obama. In the first critical miles of the budget marathon, they learned where the opposition will be strongest later in the race, especially within their own party.

"We're fighting all the bad guys," an Administration official said. The fifty-one Conservative House Democrats known as the Blue Dogs forced a reduction in the over-all amount of spending. "Their chief negotiator was Allen Boyd," Spratt told me, referring to the congressman from north Florida, "and we cut a deal—well, that's a little"—he amended his phrasing, and smiled—"came to an understanding" that "there would be a seven-billion-dollar reduction in the increase in N.D.D., non-defense discretionary spending." Other Democrats, sensitive to the concerns of lending companies, resisted an Obama idea for ending federal subsidies to private student-loan companies.

Spratt said that while "shopping the bill to see where the center of gravity lay" he found that the most resistance was on energy policies. "You go to the oil patch and the Democrats there don't like the fact that the Administration has some tax changes that they say come down on the independents"—small oil companies that might not survive the changes. "Then, you've got others who say, 'I'm not so sure about this carbon thing.' "

Spratt looked at me and asked, " 'Being B.T.U.ed'—you heard that expression?" In 1993, early in the budget process, Clinton proposed, and House Democrats voted for, a controversial tax based on the heat output—measured in British thermal units—of various energy products. The tax, the brainchild of Al Gore, was then stripped out of subsequent budget legislation. But the original B.T.U. vote contributed to the loss of several Democratic seats the following year. To "be B.T.U.ed" was to vote for an unpopular measure to help your President, only to see your President ditch the idea later in the process. The fear of being B.T.U.ed drove Spratt and, to a lesser extent, Conrad to write watered-down resolutions that included as little detail as necessary.

The Obama team took a realistic approach to the early resistance. "We don't

"When life gives me lemons, I know twenty-six ways to kill a man with a lemon."

really need the budget resolution to do a heck of a lot other than to not impinge on our ability going into the future to work with the authorizing committees to get things done," the senior Administration official said. "The budget resolution says lots of things, but those things don't really matter. The things that matter are the numbers that the various committees are going to get locked into."

Obama will spend the rest of this year fighting a war on two fronts. On one are Democrats protecting old-line economic interests: oil, gas, and coal companies; agribusiness; student-loan companies; and pharmaceutical companies and medical providers who fear that Orszag's ideas for cutting health-care costs will hit them hard. On the other are institutional interests. Obama will be battling committee chairmen who oppose his Pell-grant reforms, and placating senators who resent his willingness to use a feature of the budget process known as "reconciliation," which limits debate and prevents the use of a filibuster, to pass his health-care plan.

The budget that Orszag and his colleagues drafted was the Platonic ideal of Obamaism, a Presidential statement of principle. The too clever fiscal compromises, the friction between Orszag and Summers, and the earnest discussions about behavioral economics were all part of a fairly self-contained process, one far less infected by politics than what comes next.

Obama's White House is filled with former members of Congress and congressional staffers. They are legislative strategists and dealmakers, and these days they often use the phrase "grand bargain" when asked how they expect to achieve their ambitious agenda. The senior White House official told me that they were exploring an energy deal that would include a "serious" and "short-term" increase in domestic production—perhaps opening up for oil exploration places like the waters off the coast of California—that would appease the "Drill, baby, drill" crowd, while also adopting a cap-and-trade plan that could take effect one or two (or more) years after 2012, which is when Obama's current plan would start. "You need to have something like T. Boone Pickens and Al Gore holding hands on a broad compromise," the official said. Such a plan wouldn't look much like the one in Obama's budget proposal—more like a third cousin than like a sibling, let alone a twin—but, unlike his current plan, it could get through Congress.

The day after the resolutions passed and two days after Orszag's smooth appearance on Jon Stewart's show—there were no questions about the bailout—Orszag was sitting at the conference table in his office while several "art technicians" from the National Gallery installed a painting of Alexander Hamilton over his fireplace. "Hamilton embodied opportunity and upward mobility and fiscal discipline," he said. And "a view of government that is working in conjunction with market forces in a constructive way."

Orszag's job is to defend Obama's budget on all fronts, but he will be most deeply engaged in health care. I asked him how he could be so sure that his ideas about how to reduce health-care costs would work, mentioning that I had been surprised to learn that Paul Ryan and other Republicans had seized on health-care cost controls as the issue they believed would bring down Obama's health-care plan and, with it, they surely hoped, his Presidency. Specifically, they believed that Orszag's obsession with "comparative effectiveness," research about which treatment options work best for a given ailment, will lead to vast government intrusion into the doctor-patient relationship. The research, which received major funding in the stimulus legislation and which was also included in Obama's budget, had assumed a sinister meaning on the right.

Orszag dismissed the criticism as a caricature. "I don't see how it interferes with the doctor-patient relationship to suggest that it would be better if your doctor had more information about what would work for you," he said. "The best way of putting it is that your doctor shouldn't have disincentives to give you the higher-quality care, which often happens now." Far from a huge government bureaucracy, he proposes a simple adjustment of incentives: "You get paid more if the treatment has been shown to be effective and a little less if not." Orszag seems more right than wrong about how to bring down health-care costs, but the truth is that, while there is obviously a great deal of waste in the American medical system, nobody knows for certain whether Orszag's plan—which is now Obama's plan—will work.

As Orszag explained his ideas, I couldn't help remembering an encounter I had with him one day in the hallway at O.M.B. I told him that I had read his Princeton undergraduate thesis. He looked at me and smiled a little sheepishly. He said that at some point after his arrival at graduate school, in London, he had had a sudden realization: that he had made a mistake, and the crucial formula that he had used in his thesis, the one that had won him the prize, was incorrect. "It was *so* innovative," he said, "that it was wrong." ♦

FICTION

THE SLOWS

BY GAIL HAREVEN

The news of the decision to close the Preserves was undoubtedly the worst I had ever received. I'd known for months that it was liable to happen, but I'd deluded myself into thinking that I had more time. There had always been controversy about the need for maintaining Preserves (see B. L. Sanders, Z. Goroshovski, and Cohen and Cohen), but from this remote region I was simply unable to keep abreast of all the political ups and downs. Information got through, but to evaluate its importance, to register the emerging trends, without hearing what people were actually saying in the corridors of power was impossible. So I can't blame myself if the final decision came as a shock.

The axe fell suddenly. At six in the evening, when I got out of the shower, I found the announcement on my computer. It was just four lines long. I stood there, with a towel wrapped around my waist, reading the words that destroyed my future, that tossed away a professional investment of more than fifteen years. I can't say that I'd never envisioned this possibility when I chose to study the Slows. I can't say that it hadn't occurred to me that this might happen. But I believed that I was doing something important for the human race, and, mistakenly, I thought that the authorities felt the same way. After all, they had subsidized my research for years. Eliminating the Preserves at this stage was a loss I could barely conceive of, a loss not only for me and for my future—clearly I couldn't avoid thinking about myself—but for humanity and its very ability to understand itself. Politicians like to refer to the Slows as being deviant. I won't argue with that, but as hard as it is, as repulsive and distressing, we have to remember that our forefathers were all deviants of this kind.

I confess that I passed the rest of the evening with a bottle of whiskey. Self-pity is inevitable in situations like this, and there's no reason to be ashamed of it. The whiskey made it easier for me to get through the first few hours and fall asleep, but it certainly didn't make it any easier to get up in the morning. As if to spite me, the sky was blue, and the light was too brilliant. As often happens in this season, the revolting smell of yellow flowers went straight to my temples. When I pulled myself out of bed, I discovered that the sugar jar was empty, and I'd have to go to the office for my first cup of coffee. I knew that at some point during the day I would have to start packing up, but first I needed my coffee. I had no choice. With an aching head and a nauseating taste in my mouth, I dragged myself to the office shed. I opened the door and found a Slow woman sitting in my chair.

Despite the security guards' repeated instructions, I tended to forget to lock doors. Our camp was fenced in, we all knew one another, and the savages entered only during working hours, and then only with permission. How had she sneaked in?

Years of field work had taught me how to cope with all sorts of situations. "Good morning," I said to her. I didn't even consider reaching for the button to call the guards. True, there had been occasional attacks in other camps, but, for all sorts of reasons, there had been none in ours to date. Besides, as I always said, the people most likely to be attacked were the policemen and the missionaries, not me, so I had a logical justification for bending the rules a little.

The savage woman didn't answer me. She leaned over to pick something up from the other side of the desk, and immediately I became afraid. The fear spread rapidly from my legs to my chest, but my brain kept working. So the rumor was true: they had got their hands on a cache of old weapons. To them, perhaps we were all alike after all—policeman or scientist, it didn't matter much from their point of view. But then the woman turned back to me: she was holding a human larva strapped into a carrier, which she laid on the table.

"You promised you wouldn't take our babies from us," she said in the angry, agitated voice so typical of the Slows. As my adrenaline level fell, it was hard for me to steady my legs. The savage woman fixed me with her black eyes and seemed to see this. "You pledged that you wouldn't take them. There are treaties, and you signed them," she spat out impatiently. I was always amazed by how fast news reached the Slows. It was clear to anybody who worked with them that they were hiding computers somewhere, and perhaps they also had collaborators on the political level. The nearest settlement of Slows was a half-hour flight away. They weren't allowed to keep hoverers, and there were no tracks in the region, so to get to our camp she had to have set out the evening before. It seemed that she had known about the decision to close the Preserves even before I did.

"Those treaties were signed many generations ago. Things change," I said, though I knew that it was silly to get into an argument with one of them.

"My grandmother signed them."

"Is it your baby?" I asked, making a point of using their term, as I gestured at the human larva on my desk.

"It's mine." Luckily, the larva was asleep. Fifteen years of work had more or less inured me, but at that hour of the morning, and in my condition, I knew that my stomach wouldn't be able to stand the sight of a squirming pinkish creature.

"Do you have others?"

"Maybe." The female Slows don't usually give birth to more than three or four offspring. Given the way they are accustomed to raising offspring, even that many is hard work. This savage woman was young, as far as I could judge. She might have concealed another larva somewhere before coming here. There was no way of knowing.

"You can't break the agreements," she said, cutting into my thoughts. "No. Listen to me. You've violated almost every clause. Every few years you renege on something. When you forced us into the Preserves, you promised us autonomy, and since then you've gradually stolen everything from us. From hard experience we've learned not to trust you. Like sheep, we kept quiet and let you push us farther and farther into a corner. But now I'm warning you. Just warning you: don't you dare touch the children!"

Many people will think this strange, but over the years I've learned to see a kind of beauty in the Slow women. If you ignore the swollen protrusions on their chests and the general swelling of their bodies, if you ignore their tendency to twist their faces wildly, with some experience you can distinguish between the ugly ones and the pretty ones, and this one would definitely have been considered pretty. If her grandmother

JUSTINE KURLAND, "BABY" (2004)/MITCHELL-INNES & NASH

had really signed the treaties, as she said, she might have been one of their aristocrats, the descendant of a ruling dynasty. It was evident that she could express herself.

"Will you agree to have some coffee with me?" Field work often involves long hours of conversation. With time I had got used to the physical proximity of the Slows, and sometimes, when their suspicions subsided—when they accepted that I wasn't a missionary in disguise—they told me important things. The new decree had put an end to my research, but I might still be able to write something about the reaction of the savages to the development. Attentiveness had become a habit with me, and, besides, I was not yet capable of packing up the office.

"Coffee," I repeated. "Can I make some for you?" Since she didn't answer and just stared at me with a blurred face, I said, "You've certainly come a long way. It wouldn't hurt me to have a cup, either. Wait a minute, and I'll make some for both of us." The Slows had grown used to harsh treatment, and when they encountered one of us who treated them courteously they tended to get flustered. Indeed, this dark-eyed woman seemed confused, and she kept her mouth shut while I operated the beverage machine.

No doubt the savages were a riddle that science had not yet managed to solve, and, the way things seemed now, it never would be solved. According to the laws of nature, every species should seek to multiply and expand, but for some reason this one appeared to aspire to wipe itself out. Actually, not only itself but also the whole human race. Slowness was an ideology, but not only an ideology. As strange as it sounds, it was a culture, a culture similar to that of our forefathers. People don't know, or perhaps they forget, that when the technique for Accelerated Offspring Growth (A.O.G.) was developed it wasn't immediately put to use. Until the first colonies were established on the planets, the U.N. Charter prohibited A.O.G. It's not pleasant to think about it now, but the famous Miller, German, and Yaddo were subjected to quite a bit of condemnation for their early work on the technique, all of it on ethical grounds. In a society that had not yet conquered space, A.O.G. was viewed as a catastrophe that, within ten years, was liable to cause a population explosion on Earth, which would exterminate life through hunger and disease. The morality of the Slows had an undeniably rational basis, under those conditions. We may be revolted by the thought, but the fact is that Miller, German, and Yaddo had all spent the first years of their lives as human larvae, not unlike the one that was now lying on my desk; they, too, had been slowly reared by savage females, just like the one who was waiting beside me for her coffee.

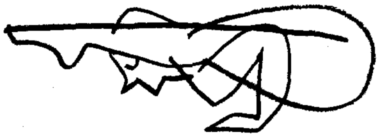
"We have to talk," she said as I placed the cup on the desk and glanced for just a split second at the creature sleeping in the carrier. "There's no reason for you to use power. There's no point, because you have all the power anyway. We're no threat to you."

I knew something that she didn't know, because it was a secret that hadn't been publicized on the networks: in one of the colonies on Gamma, far from the Preserves, there had been an outbreak of Slowness. This was probably why the decision had been made to close all the Preserves at once—to eliminate any possibility of the infection spreading.

"It's possible to compromise on all sorts of clauses," the savage woman said, "so why not compromise with us? We'll die out on our own in a few generations anyway. There are less than ten thousand of us left."

The problem isn't one of numbers, I thought, but I didn't say it to her. The problem is that in many people's eyes you are not a remnant but a gangrene that could spread and rot the entire body of humankind. Even I, with my interest in your way of life, can't say for certain that the politicians are wrong about this.

"We've thought of all kinds of possibilities," she said. "Since we have no choice, we'll agree to let your missionaries into our settlements. We'll guarantee their safety and give them complete freedom to talk to whomever they wish. We'll agree that one parent's consent is enough in order for a baby to be surrendered for accelerated growth, and we'll make sure that parents obey that rule. What else do you want? What else can you demand? In the end, without wasting any more energy on us, you'll get everything you want anyway."



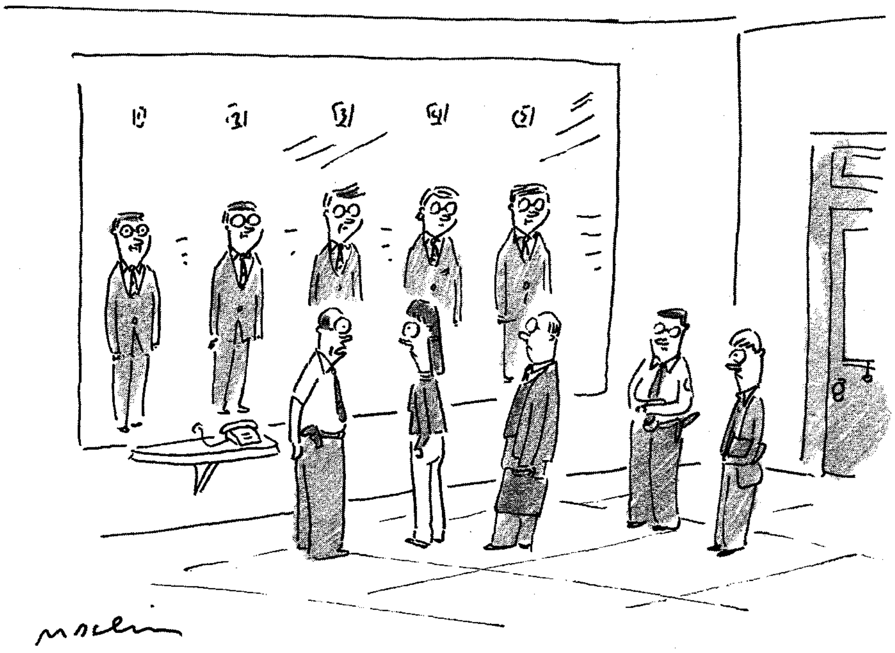
"Not this one," I interjected, pointing at her larva. A tremor twisted her face and made it ugly. I drank the coffee and noticed that the larva had opened its eyes. The coffee was sour. The machine was apparently not working properly again. But there was no point in calling in a serviceman when I had only a few more days to spend here.

"Don't take them away from us," she whispered, and her voice shook. "I need at least a few years. You must allow us that. Why do you hate us so?"

The ardent possessiveness that savage parents—especially the mothers—display toward their offspring is the key to understanding the Slows' culture. It's clear that they don't love their offspring the way we love ours. They make do with so few, and, at the rate they rear them, at best they get to know only their children's children. Whereas even I—who have spent years away from civilization in barren camps like this one—have managed to produce seventeen sons and daughters and a lineage of at least forty generations. Still, they talk constantly about their love for their offspring, and its glory.

"Hate?" I said to her. "Hate is a strong word."

The human larva turned its head and gaze toward the savage woman. Her eyes clung to it, and her chin quivered. She had pretty eyes. She had put on black and green makeup in my honor. A week or two of body formation would have made a good-looking woman of her, in anyone's opinion. She trusted me, apparently, knowing who I was, having heard about me or made inquiries, and perhaps she hoped that, as a researcher, I would agree to represent her side. She had put herself in jeopardy by sneaking into my office in this way. Someone else in my place might have panicked, and an unnecessary accident might have taken place. Through her grimaces you could see a face that wasn't at all stupid. She had certainly taken my well-known curiosity into account, and my composure. She knew that all I had to do was reach



"Look closely, Ms. Fleere—do you see the man who managed your hedge fund?"

out and press a button, and they would come, chase her away, and take the larva from her. I wasn't about to do that, but sooner or later, no matter where she hid, it would be taken.

In all my years of work, I'd refrained from saying anything that would identify me with the missionaries, but now, seeing the tremble of her chin, I heard their words of consolation coming from my mouth. So be it. In any event, my work had come to an end.

"I know what you think, what they've told you. Lots of misunderstandings and rumors circulate in the Preserves. Listen to me, I promise you that no harm will come to the children."

"Do you mean that you won't take them?" the savage princess asked in a soft, strange voice. "That the decision has been revoked?"

"Decisions aren't my field. People like me don't make policy. What I want to explain to you is another matter. Maybe you think that accelerated growth will shorten this offspring's life. Believe me, woman, that's a mistake. Whoever told you that was either wrong or lying. Our life span is no shorter than yours. Actually, the opposite is true: progress gives us a longer life. If your son is ultimately given over to A.O.G., he won't lose even a single day. On the contrary, he can enjoy all the years before him as an independent adult. You'll see your son's children, and your descendants will inherit the planets."

The savage woman twisted her jaw to the side. "You think we're stupid."

The Slows have manners of their own. You can't expect them to behave like us. Still, in her present situation I would have expected her to make an effort. But the very fact that she wasn't making an effort held my interest. Perhaps this was an opportunity for me to hear something new. Usually they were so cautious when speaking to us, and behaved evasively even with me.

But just at that moment the larva started to bleat, and the savage woman instantly lost her impertinence.

"You may do it," I said to her. "Pick it up. I've been in the Preserves for years, and I've seen such things."

Without looking at me, she freed the larva from the carrier and held it to her chest. I observed six of my offspring during the process of accelerated growth, and the distress of the first weeks, before they reached decent maturity, comes back to me every time I'm forced to observe a human larva up close. There are times in a person's life that are meant to be private, and the state of infancy is certainly the most pronounced of these. The larva was silent for a moment, then it started to bleat again.

"How old is it?"

"Eleven weeks." The most horrifying human larvae are the big ones, which already look like people but lack the stamp of humanity. At least this one was similar in dimensions to our offspring. Nearly three months old. He could have been a productive adult already. Footsteps could be heard outside, and the sound of two people talking. The savage woman's eyes widened. She put her hand first to her mouth and then to the larva's open mouth.

"Don't worry. They won't come in here. They know that I hold interviews." The touch of the woman's hand on the creature's lips increased its discomfort, and now it raised its voice, screeching until its wrinkled face turned almost purple. Someone was liable to enter after all. The savage woman stuck a finger into the larva's mouth, but it turned its head away and looked for something else.

"Don't you feel sorry for it?" I asked, but she seemed not to hear me, cradling the larva in her arms and also turning her head here and there with an unfocussed look in her eyes.

Human beings as we know them are excited by every development in their offspring, because what purpose is there for the hard labor of parenthood if not to send forth an independent, productive adult who can satisfy his own needs? But the Slows appeared to enjoy the helplessness of their larvae—the lack of humanity, the deplorable fervor of the little creatures, their muteness, their mindless appetites, their selfishness, their ignorance, their inability to act. It seemed that the most disgusting of traits were what inspired the most love in savage parents.

The screeches stunned me. I was so riveted by the sight of that wriggling caterpillar that I almost missed the moment when the woman started talking again. "If we knew how much time was left for us . . ." So she didn't know everything: the invasion would start that day; it might already have begun. "If we knew that we had another year or two, if you would only tell us how much time there is, people could prepare them-

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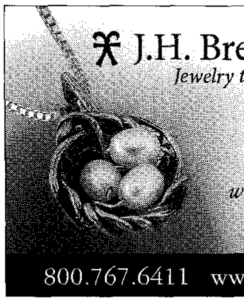

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selves." Had she come as a spy? If they greeted the police with violence, they'd only bring disaster down upon themselves. A few spontaneous uprisings were to be expected. After all, theirs was a volatile culture. But an organized attack would be a kind of stupidity that was hard to fathom.

"I'm asking for so little," the savage woman said. "Just this—to know how much time remains for us. Listen to me. I know you're different from them. You're not a missionary. You know us. You're merciful, not like them. I feel it. You could have called the guards when you saw me here, but you didn't do it. Maybe you once also had a baby you loved."

The larva arched its body backward, and the woman unconsciously fingered the opening of her shirt. Suddenly I knew what she wanted to do, and with that thought the sourness of the coffee rose in my throat. To give it her milk bulges—that's what she wanted, that's why she was plucking at her shirt. When I was a student, I was forced to watch a film about ancient nutrition customs. It was for a course restricted to advanced students, but none of us were advanced enough to view that sight without a sharp feeling of nausea. From close up we watched the ravenous face of the larva and the swollen organ thrust into its wet mouth. It was a rather large larva, at least thirteen pounds, and the depraved sucking noises that it emitted mingled with the female's bestial murmur. White liquid dripped down its chin, and the woman tickled its lips with her gland, holding the organ shamelessly between finger and lustful thumb. I still remember the strong protest voiced by three women students, which was understandable.

"If you'll just answer me that," the savage woman said, and her voice shook with feeling. "Just that."

The emotionality of the Slows had the strange characteristic of clinging to me like a stain. As sometimes happened after a few hours of conversation with one of them, I began to feel polluted. "The good of the children is the only thing that we consider," I said finally. "Do you want a cup of water? I see that you haven't touched your coffee."

When I got up and went back to the machine, the woman bent her body over the larva, almost concealing it under a black curtain of hair. The cold water refreshed my mouth, removed the traces of yesterday's drink and the bitterness of the coffee, dislodged the clinging feeling. I drank two cups. It is sometimes possible to identify rational thought among the Slows, but their emotional exaggeration dilutes it. Though I had hoped to calm the savage woman, at that moment it was clear that there was no point in trying.

When I returned to the desk with a cup of water for her, I saw that she was rocking slowly on the chair, moving the larva rhythmically back and forth. It was tired from so much screeching, and its voice was growing weaker. She was so deeply immersed in her drugged movement that she didn't notice me. I watched the two tired bodies moving together, and knew that soon, very soon, there would be an end to their suffering. The larva would become a man in control of his body, and she would accept it and smile. With clarity I saw that image, and, as though to transmit it to her, I reached out and placed my hand on her shoulder. All at once, like an animal, the woman recoiled, raised her head, and bared her teeth. The sudden movement jolted my body backward, and for a long moment we were frozen, twisted in mid-movement, looking into each other's face.

"Don't touch me!" she spat out, as though at an enemy. Her face was transparent, and I could read everything in it, all her distorted thoughts. She believed that what I wanted was to hold her soft body, to curl my fingers and grasp her flesh, to press it against mine and rub, blind and hopeless, against her milk glands. Her eyes, like snakes, penetrated my thoughts and fed them her abominable vision, the visions of a lower animal. For nine years I had been in the Preserves, and never had I experienced such a defilement.

"No one's touching you," I pronounced with difficulty, turning toward the door and putting my hand out to press the button. By the time the alarm went off, and the sound of the larva's weeping reached me, I was already in the light—in the bright, bright light outside. ♦

(*Translated, from the Hebrew, by Yaacov Jeffrey Green.*)

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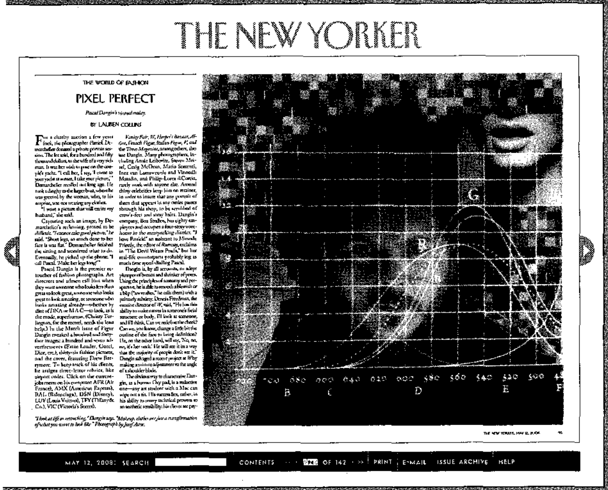

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BY LAUREN COLLINS

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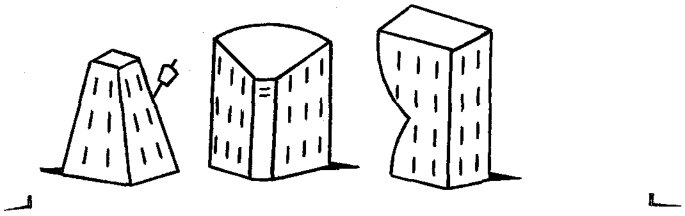


ON TELEVISION

COCKEYED OPTIMIST

Amy Poehler gets her own sitcom.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

Is there a more appealing performer on television than Amy Poehler? Yes, "appealing" sounds bland and unappreciative, and it's unspecific, but the radiance and the warmth that come from Poehler are general and broad in the best way, and they offer a universal welcome. There's no entrance fee of coolness or hipness for enjoying her humor, and you don't hate yourself afterward. In turn, her audience wishes her well; of all the cast members on "Saturday Night Live" in the past ten years or so (Poehler was on the show from 2001 to 2008), she's probably the one whom people most love to love. Every comedian is saying, "Hey, look at me!" Poehler's characters, in addition to that, seem to be saying, "Hey, let's go hang out at my house after school and have some snacks! Yay!" Her performer's demand for attention and need for control get acted out in characters who display relentless and mostly cockeyed enthusiasm—they're people who are desperate to bubble over. That's where Poehler's edge is—the place where her inclusiveness meets the "me me me" of the comedian's ego. She wants you to come and play, but she'll be the one who decides what snacks you're going to eat, what games you're going to play, and what time you have to go home. That's how she could be just right when she played Dakota Fanning as a talk-show host on "S.N.L.," breaking down the child star's unsettling self-presentation into its components of innocent bubbliness and burning ambition.

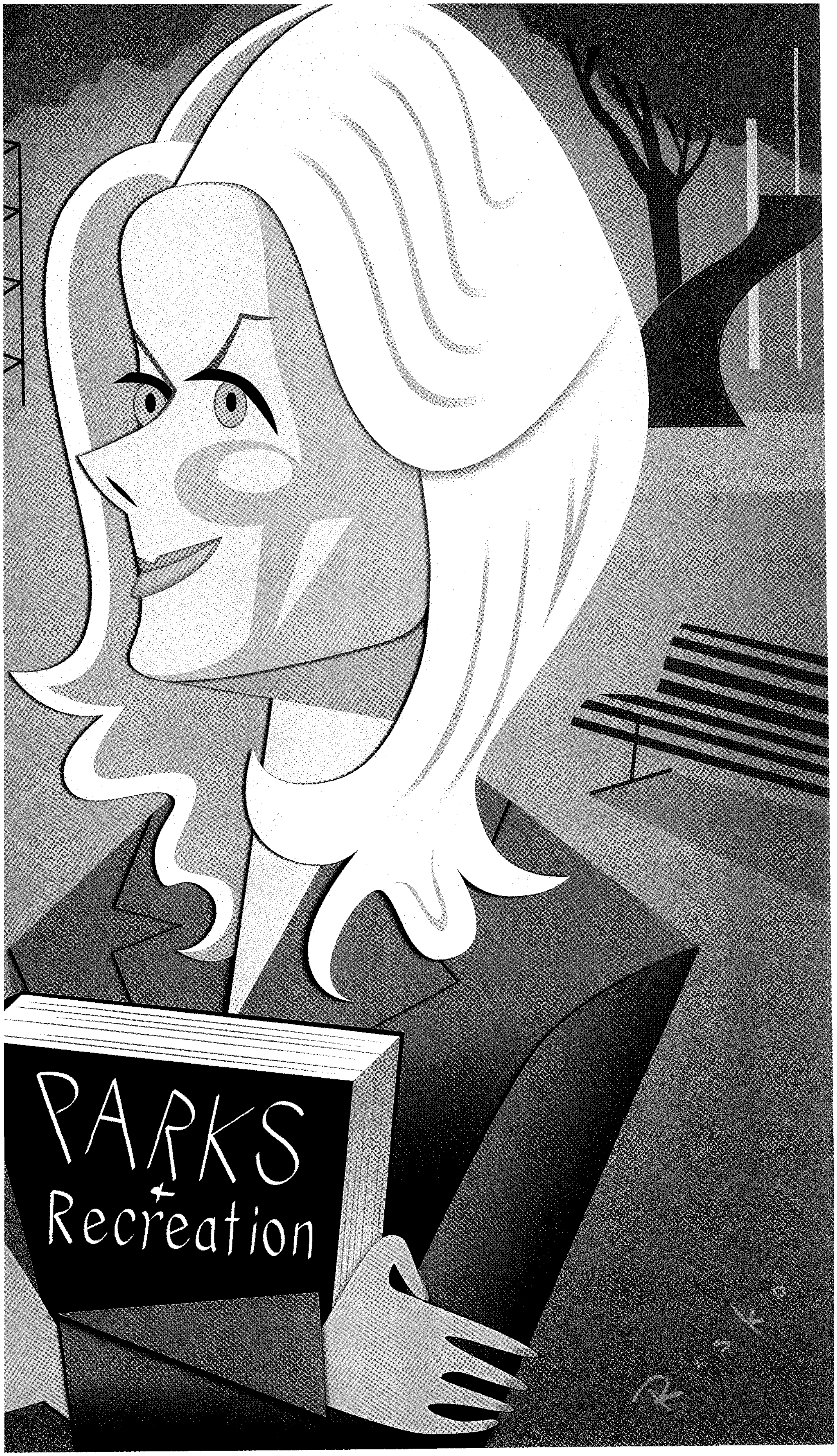
But, while Poehler's impressions on "S.N.L." were wicked, they weren't usually cruel (unless it can be considered cruel to call attention to a politician's phoniness or a celebrity's self-absorption). They weren't necessarily all terrific, either, or dead on. Her seeming good nature may have prevented her from truly nailing Hillary Clinton during the campaign last year; the words were right, the attitude was right, but something was missing—and perhaps it's difficult to know how far to go in skewering someone when you know that your boss is going to invite that person to come on the show. (Tina Fey's killer takedown of Sarah Palin was ever so slightly less sensational the night that Palin appeared on the show.) In any case, Poehler's performances had a spirit that didn't depend on pinpoint accuracy; her forte is showing the chaos that is about to, and sometimes does, break through even the most apparently composed characters. The best part of her take on Clinton had to do with expressing the way Clinton's not quite getting what she wanted made her, underneath it all, crazed.

To old-time watchers of "S.N.L.," Poehler was Gilda Radner and Jane Curtin rolled into one. And you always felt in good hands during a Poehler skit; unlike some of the other performers—the men of recent years come to mind—she never seemed sloppy or on the verge of being downright awful. As was also true when watching Phil Hartman, another reliable, all-around player, you never thought, Man, how did she ever get on this show? She also rocked, doing an awesome rap number during the "Weekend Update" segment when Palin was on—a loudly percussive litany of ridicule, ending with Poehler standing behind a seated Palin and stabbing the air with her index finger to the sound of gunshots, throwing all her weight into it, in homage to Palin's hunting habit. The Governor may have felt as if she'd been poked in the eye with a sharp stick; to a viewer it didn't seem cruel, just brave. (It was impressive in another way as well: Poehler, limber and always on the beat during the number, was pregnant to the max, and gave birth just a week later.)

Poehler has been doing improvisational comedy for about half her life (she's thirty-seven), and you sense that what drives her isn't quite the need to entertain but, rather, a desire to perform, to keep getting better at her craft. She still does improv in a New York theatre with the Upright Citizens Brigade, and she has branched out to other areas, voicing the manic main character, Bessie Higgenbottom, an energetic steamroller of a little girl, in a Nickelodeon cartoon called "The Mighty B!" and hosting a Web series for pre-teen girls called "Smart Girls at the Party," in which she interviews kids who do interesting but not intimidatingly spectacular things. They're regular kids—one loves to garden, one dances, one does yoga—and Poehler talks to them in a low-key, engaging tone of voice. She introduces each guest in a funny and sweetly hyperbolic way—she described the third grader who did yoga as a "yogini, inventor, philosopher, humanitarian, gravity-defyer, and chocolate lover," making the girl smile. The project is far from being an ego trip; Poehler says at the beginning of each six-minute episode that the aim is to "celebrate extraordinary individuals who are changing the world by being themselves," and the modest show does just that.

So this brings me, a little uncomfortably, to the show that Poehler is now starring in, "Parks and Recreation," which began a couple of weeks ago and runs in NBC's Thursday-night comedy block. It was inevitable and fitting that Poehler would get her own show—fitting, but maybe not the best fit. The series, which was created by Greg Daniels and Michael Schur, comedy-writing veterans whose

In NBC's "Parks and Recreation," Poehler plays a perky, can-do gal, proud to be a government worker.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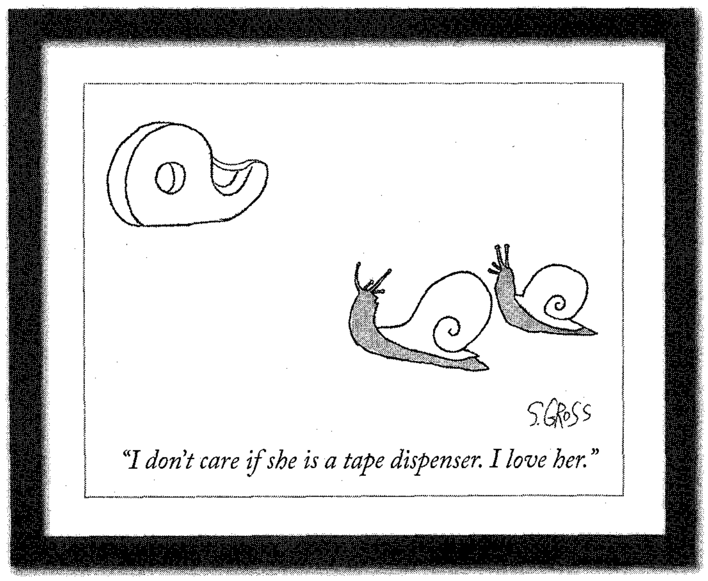

"I don't care if she is a tape dispenser. I love her."

Sam Gross, 1998

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credits include "The Office" and "Saturday Night Live," is done in the now possibly overworked style known as mockumentary, and Poehler plays Leslie Knope, the deputy director of the Parks and Recreation Department in Pawnee, Indiana. She's a clipboard-toting, can-do gal, proud to be a government worker. In a playground, after trying without response to quiz a little girl playing in the sand about her enjoyment of the park and to get a drunk off a slide with a broom, she smiles and says, "You know, government isn't just a boy's club anymore. . . . It's a great time to be a woman in politics—Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, me, Nancy Pelosi." Leslie says this line the way she says everything else, with a smile on her face that is not properly tuned to the occasion, eyes a little too wide with optimism and ambition, and all irony or self-awareness barred at the door. Setting up a visit to her mother (Pamela Reed), a "mucky-muck in the county school system," she looks into the camera and attests that her mother is "as respected as Mother Teresa, she's as powerful as Stalin, and she's as beautiful as Margaret Thatcher." Of course, her mother is awful to her, and we see Leslie scrambling to keep her pride in the presence of this spirit-crusher. That's a good moment. And there are many of them in "Parks and Recreation," in fact; virtually every scene in the first two episodes contains good bits, with quotable quotes, twists of language that viewers feel smart for getting, and visual gags. But the minutes don't flow; they merely accrete, one bit on top of another. The show has a lot—too much—in common with "The Office"; almost every character in that show has a counterpart in the office of "Parks." And I'm not sure I want to see the Leslie Knope character get more rounded out, as Steve Carell's paper-salesman Michael Scott has done over the seasons. It's not that Poehler isn't capable of playing a full character—she's a comic actress, not simply a comedian—but, given what the story is so far, the road to self-discovery appears to be mined with humiliation and disappointment. And yet if Leslie doesn't get a clue, every episode is doomed to be more or less the same. Leslie's big issue, her baby, is an abandoned construction pit that she wants to fill in and turn into a park—"This could be my Hoover Dam"—but it may be that for "Parks and Recreation" the pit is only going to get deeper. ♦

BOOKS

DOCTOR AND PATIENT

A Portuguese novelist dissects his country.

BY PETER CONRAD

António Lobo Antunes's novels examine Portugal's glorious but often brutal past.

ANDRÉ CARRILHO

The Portuguese novelist António Lobo Antunes discovered his literary vocation while delivering babies, performing amputations, and carving up corpses. Lobo Antunes trained as a doctor, and in the early nineteen-seventies, during military service, he was dispatched to Angola, near the end of a futile war in which the faltering Portuguese empire grappled to retain its African colony. In a makeshift infirmary, he lopped off limbs while a queasy quartermaster—disqualified from operating because the sight of blood made him sick—turned away and recited instructions from a textbook. Lobo Antunes also assisted a witch doctor who presided over births. As he recalls in a new volume of essays and short stories, "The Fat Man and Infinity" (translated by Margaret Jull Costa; Norton; $26.95), he spent hours struggling "to pull living babies from half-dead mothers" and sometimes emerged into the daylight "holding in my hands a small tremulous life," while mango trees rustled overhead and mandrills looked on. At such moments, he came "closest to what is commonly known as happiness." The experience brought about a novelist's epiphany. There was another way, Lobo Antunes saw, to fill the world with extra existences: characters could emerge fully formed from their creator's brain, rather than making their blood-smeared escape from the womb.

With luck, a novelist can beget new lives, but he is also obliged to commemorate lives that cannot be saved. Back in Lisbon, after the war, Lobo Antunes worked at a hospital that treated children with cancer. The experience provoked a metaphysical rage; he found himself railing against a God who permitted such agony. He watched as a five-year-old boy with leukemia screamed for morphine. When the child died, two orderlies arrived with a stretcher, but the wasted body was so small that they chose to bundle it in a sheet. A foot slumped free of the shroud and dangled ineffectually in the air. Lobo Antunes decided, he said in a recent interview, "to write for that foot."

Lobo Antunes published his first two novels in 1979. Since then, there have been twenty-one others, earning him a succession of European prizes. He is less well known to American readers, although nearly half of his novels have appeared in English—most recently "What Can I Do When Everything's on Fire?" (translated by Gregory Rabassa; Norton; $19.95)—and Dalkey Archive has begun to publish earlier, previously untranslated Lobo Antunes works, starting with the 1980 novel "Knowledge of Hell" (translated by Clifford E. Landers; $13.95). Internationally, Lobo Antunes is overshadowed by his older colleague José Saramago, who won the Nobel Prize in 1998. At home, the two writers, like rival political parties or sports teams, have noisy partisans, and those who cheer for Lobo Antunes claim that the wrong man won the Nobel. Lobo Antunes himself apparently agrees: when the *Times* called for a comment on Saramago's victory he grumbled that the phone was out of order and abruptly hung up.

Their cramped country may not be big enough for both men, but from a distance the internecine feud hardly matters. Good novelists are unique, which makes them incomparable. Saramago is a benign magus whose fictions smilingly suspend reality; Lobo Antunes is more like an exorcist, frantically battling to cast out evil and to heal the body politic. Saramago's secular parables, set mostly in unnamed or imaginary countries, easily float off into universality. Lobo Antunes remains obsessively local, worrying over the inherited ailments of Portuguese history and the debilities of its culture. He aims, like Joyce's Stephen Dedalus taking upon himself the woes of Ireland, to be a national conscience, reminding his newly Europeanized, sleekly prosperous compatriots of their shaming past—a legacy of guilt left by the dictatorship of António de Oliveira Salazar, who ruled the country from 1932 to 1968, and by the brutality of his colonial regime in Africa. The Portuguese have officially chosen to forget this era of suffocating oppression, when the Catholic Church unctuously sanctified the strictures of a Fascist state. Lobo Antunes assails the moral cowardice of those who tolerated persecution or quietly collaborated with Salazar's secret police, and is disgusted by Portugal's recent veneer of affluence and spendthrift hedonism. A novel always reveals to us the world inside someone else's head. In the case of Lobo Antunes, that world is the size of a country—small and marginal, perhaps, but teeming with villainy and vice, and as crammed with wounds and festering sores as an overcrowded hospital ward.

Lobo Antunes was born in Lisbon in 1942 and claims that he decided to be a novelist at the age of seven. When he was sixteen, however, his father sent him to medical school, where he trained as a psychiatrist. His medical and literary careers progressed in parallel, and he is still the director of a Lisbon geriatric clinic. Brooding over the Nobel Prize, Lobo Antunes once said, "My medical career would terminate the moment I cash that check." But his day job has been the making of him, and it isn't easy to dissociate his artistry from his clinical skills. During his medical training, he attended what he calls "the lesson at the morgue," and what he learned there shaped his methods as a writer. In one novel, a character narrates a nightmare with a postmortem examination of himself, and Lobo Antunes makes clear that this is an elementary and unavoidable part of literary activity. "You're a writer and never thought of this?" the character asks the book's narrator, a journalist. "You never imagine yourself naked, smelling of formaldehyde, flat on your back in a marble tub, waiting for them to cut open your ribs with a huge pair of scissors?" Few of us are brave enough to entertain that thought; lacking volunteers, Lobo Antunes serves as his own specimen. In 2007, he underwent surgery for intestinal cancer, and, knowing how his body would look cut open, recorded the experience in a series of articles. Writing, as he practices it, can be creepily close to vivisection, and his novels conduct an autopsy that is both personal and political.

Some of Lobo Antunes's earlier books seem too laceratingly confessional to be called fiction at all. In "Knowledge of Hell," a narrator, whose name happens to be António Lobo Antunes, agonizes during a long drive over the failure of his marriage and the futility of his work in psychiatry. Lobo Antunes the narrator admits that his patients serve as a novelist's exploited, manipulated playthings: a psychiatrist is able to "live among distorted men" and fish in "the agitated, rancorous aquarium of their brains." This dabbling in neurosis is second nature to writers, who are, in his opinion, "adult people torturing themselves to create school compositions, imaginary intrigues, useless imbroglios."

The novels that followed "Knowledge of Hell" extend beyond this self-purgation. Lobo Antunes, who admires Faulkner, shares his partiality for overlapping monologues, which gives the impression that an entire society is incautiously confiding in an analyst or a confessor. "Fado Alexandrino," published in 1983, uses this polyphonic technique to investigate the failed hopes of Portugal's recent history. The "fado" of the title is the music of helpless resignation: the word means "fate," and it refers to the ululating laments declaimed by singers—wrapped in funereal black shawls, their faces set in a rictus of misery—in Lisbon's night clubs. Here the vocalists are four soldiers who return disillusioned, like Lobo Antunes himself, from a colonial war, this one in Mozambique. They become disgruntled witnesses to the 1974 revolution, in which the army bloodlessly toppled the moribund Fascist regime. That uprising occurred on April 25th, which made it a rite of spring—a carnival of renewal, celebrated by soldiers with carnations in the muzzles of their guns. The rejoicing, as the novel demonstrates, did not last long. Leftist hardliners took over and, for a while, it seemed that Portugal would be captured by Communism. The ideology that prevailed, however, was consumerism. Lobo Antunes's cohorts helplessly watch their nation's collapse from idealism into self-indulgence, and even surrender to it themselves during a boozy reunion that takes them on a long crawl through bars and brothels. Their night of carousing ends in a death: one member of the gang is murdered, and the rest share blame for inciting the crime. The novel pessimistically concludes that there is no way of salvaging a society so embedded in the past: revolution seems "so absurd in a country that was worm-eaten," and the flag-waving and chanting of the ideologues amount to little more than "a ridiculous piece of fiction, a puppet show, a complete farce."

Lobo Antunes's contrapuntal narrative functions as a rejoinder to the Fascist cult of corporatism, in which Salazar's state assumed that its citizens, equalized by conformity, became indistinguishable from one another. The discordant monologues of the novels allow individuals to tell their stories, though in doing so they erode the bonds of family and community and end in a kind of solitary confinement. Lobo Antunes transcribes the complaints of Portugal's "little people," who once—as a slumdweller in "Fado Alexandrino" says—relied on Heaven to look after them; now their advocate is a novelist. Making this his mission, Lobo Antunes has progressively extended the bandwidth of his monologues. In "What Can I Do When Everything's on Fire?" he intertwines the fractured soliloquies of transvestites in a Lisbon night club, their nervily anonymous clients, a hospital orderly, and a solicitous journalist investigating this dim underworld. An epigraph taken from the fourth-century Christian scholar Epiphanius hints at the purpose behind this ghostly babble: "I am you and you are me; where you are, I am, and in all things I find myself dispersed." Dispersal is our dusty fate, but our ashes and our drifting atoms can mingle. Although his venal characters pursue selfish agendas, Lobo Antunes's technique emphasizes their interrelation and appeals to our commiseration. He is still writing for the foot that he saw hanging from that improvised shroud.

One Faulkner novel in particular serves as a prototype for Lobo Antunes: in "As I Lay Dying," a dead matriarch, as though still conscious inside her coffin, muses on her life while her family makes tragicomic efforts to get her body buried. Lobo Antunes's macabre narratives often deal with an impatient deathwatch, or trace the muddled disposal of a corpse. In "Act of the Damned," a stricken paterfamilias listens while his heirs—a motley brood of "sluts and spineless cuckolds"—squabble over his estate. In "The Inquisitors' Manual," a former official in Salazar's government, bedridden after a stroke like the one that disabled Salazar himself, is slowly driven mad as his progeny wrangle and plan to make off with his spoils.

Another funeral, malodorously postponed, comes at the start of Lobo Antunes's larkiest, most engagingly inventive book, "The Return of the Caravels." The poet Luís de Camões—who, in 1572, in "The Lusiads," celebrated Vasco da Gama's maritime discoveries and supplied Portugal with a national epic intended to match Homer's Iliad and Virgil's Aeneid—comes home from Africa four centuries later with a coffin containing his father. Bureaucratic delays hold up the interment, and the long-dead body starts to bubble, seething with "a fervor of worms." (According to Portuguese law, the dead are entitled to spend only a few years underground, after which, because space is so scarce, their bones must be exhumed and pummelled to powder.) History, Lobo Antunes suggests, is a corpse that will not remain in its grave.

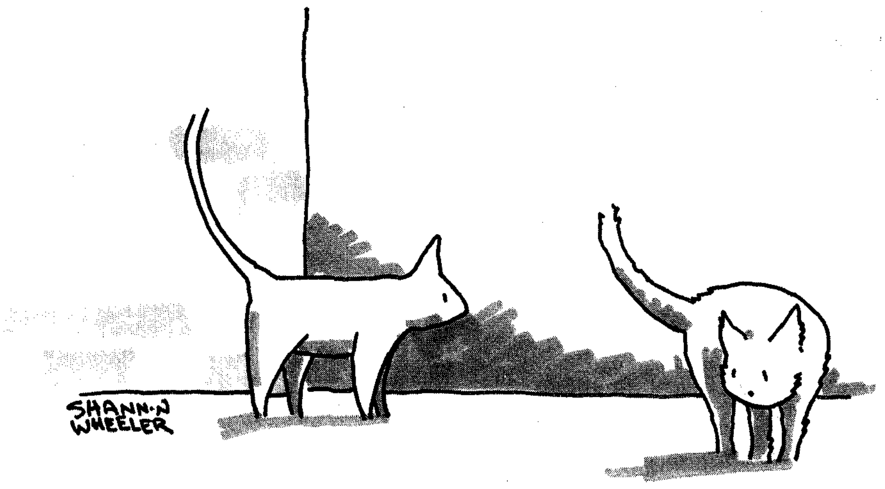
The caravels, cockleshell boats that took Portuguese seafarers off to new worlds, return carrying the shabby detritus of empire. Vasco da Gama and other explorers with heroic pedigrees are jumbled among the fractious, indiscriminate rabble of *retornados*, who retreated to Portugal in the nineteen-seventies, after the loss of the country's African empire. The *retornados*—most of them petty merchants, shopkeepers, and civil servants—spent years grousing and venting their grievances on street corners while their possessions moldered in dockside warehouses. "The Return of the Caravels" makes epochs collide in a brawling comic chaos. Renaissance Portugal, still viewed as a golden age of achievement, collapses into the grubby present. Lisbon, reconstructed on a stern neoclassical grid after it was destroyed in the earthquake of 1755, is now a shapeless Third World midden; a floating populace of refugees, ruffians, smugglers, and Gypsies, swarms in shantytowns, feeding on roasted cats.

At one point, Vasco is summoned to an audience with King Manuel I:

> Forty-two years had passed since Vasco da Gama had last spoken to the monarch, and after uncounted months in the antechamber, reading doctor's office magazines, mingling with executives in vests, astrologers in star-speckled capes, representatives of majority, minority, and nonexistent political parties, an Italian journalist, and a delegation from the bakers' union, encased in the powder of their morning flour, he found an aged prince shooing away flies with his scepter, a tin crown with glass rubies on his head, and the applesauce halitosis of a diabetic huddled on the seat of a Gothic window that opened out onto the galleons of his squadron, which he was contemplating without interest in the melancholy of his flu.

That bulging sentence contains many of Lobo Antunes's distinctive qualities: the profusion of detail that delights in mess; the word games that flirt with the nullity of language; the professional acumen that diagnoses the king's disease and finds a poetic simile to catch the precise odor of his sickly breath. The mania for noticing things detains us, but as readers we spend the decelerated time more pleasurably than Vasco da Gama, who cools his heels impatiently in the waiting room; when we finally reach the end of the sentence, Lobo Antunes, having boisterously enlivened this listless interval, defies us to share the king's boredom. Manuel and Vasco walk out into the evening, and the king asks the explorer for a deck of cards: "I want to see if you still know how to cheat." In no time, the beached voyager gains control of Lisbon, thanks to a series of dodgy card tricks—a neat parody of the supposedly ennobling but ultimately squalid business of colonial acquisition.

Lobo Antunes's implosion of Portuguese history works so well because revenants from the country's grandiose past can be seen all over Lisbon, stiff with rigor mortis. Statues of navigators, of the kings who prompted their expeditions, and of the bards who obsequiously sang their praises scan the horizon from the pedestals. Camões has a monumental column of his own; the nineteenth-century novelist Eça de Queirós embraces a lissome marble muse in a garden; and a bronze effigy of the modernist poet Fernando Pessoa sits at a table outside a café that he once frequented, looking as if he had metallized while waiting for a refill. (As yet, there is no statue of Lobo Antunes, but a street has been named after him in the northern town of Nelas.) The Portuguese are proud of these venerable ancestors, but they can't help feeling belittled by them. How did a country that once counted Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Goa, and Macao as outlying provinces forfeit its empire and retract to the cramped edge of the Iberian Peninsula? If the poem of nationhood is a proud, ceremonious epic like "The Lusiads," which ends with a prophecy of Portugal's abiding glory, the writers who come later are bound to describe a lapse into mean, mediocre mock epic. To make matters



"Didn't I see you on YouTube riding a Roomba?"

worse, Lisbon itself claims mythical origins: in early sources it is called Olissipo, in homage to Ulysses, who allegedly founded the city during his long, digressive journey home from Troy. Joyce's Dubliners in "Ulysses" don't know that they are recapitulating Homer's epic, so they suffer from no sense of shrunken inadequacy. But the Portuguese—who still salute themselves as maritime heroes when they sing their national anthem, even though their seagoing exploits are now confined to trawling for cod—can't avoid invidious comparisons between past and present.

The lofty statues in Lisbon's squares represent the judgment of history. Lobo Antunes pities their "heroic cramps," and fancies that they might be shamming immobility; his revenge is to move them around like figures on a chessboard, asserting the right of the present to rearrange the past. The statue of the Marquês de Pombal, an enlightened autocrat who rebuilt Lisbon after the earthquake, migrates all over the city. In one novel, he leaves his plinth and tipsily reels down the hill toward the river; in another, he takes a break in a restaurant, where "his rusty imposing presence" is seen "sipping lemon tea with broad, bronze historic gestures." Statues that brag about exploration and conquest are cleverly reoriented, or mocked for their inability to stride through space. Magellan, who found a way to the Spice Islands in the Pacific, points down an avenue to a shopping district that might be "a lost island of his own discovery, an island of discount stores selling wooden knickknacks." In a vast, vacant square by the river, King José I straddles a transfixed horse that "trotted motionless toward India in search of eight-armed concubines."

Lobo Antunes views Portugal's discoveries as feats of conjuring, deceptive tricks like those performed by a literary fantasist. Prince Henry the Navigator sends Vasco da Gama off to find Brazil and tow it home; Vasco obliges, tugging the "stupidly enormous" landmass in his wake, though he is unable to control the flocks of raucous imported parrots that fly away shrieking across Lisbon "like a waving of colorful bath towels." Because the accumulated colonies are too bulky to fit into tiny Portugal, superfluous realms are sneakily stuffed into municipal garbage cans: tropical rivers are discarded as waste, jumbled with "leftover grains of rice and packages of cough drops."

Saramago beguilingly contradicts this dead end in his "Tale of the Unknown Island," when a nameless king declares that there are no new worlds left to discover. One of his subjects stubbornly insists that there must still be an unknown island and volunteers to find it. But only a cleaning woman will sign on for his quixotic voyage, so he gets nowhere. Then, in the story's sudden, miraculous conclusion, the deserted boat becomes the imaginary island itself: the deck burgeons and blooms, as plants twine around the masts, and the fertilized caravel continues travelling in search of itself. Saramago transfers the geographic adventure to the imagination, which will never accept that reality runs out at the horizon. Lobo Antunes is less optimistic: he reduces the process of decolonization to rubbish-dumping, deriding the revolutionaries who so hastily withdrew from Africa. This bungling anticlimax suits the national mood of *saudade*—a nostalgia for some remote, unremembered epoch during which the Portuguese were happy and their country ruled the waves. Saramago gratifies his readers by making the explorer's dream come true; Lobo Antunes, always the physician charged with imparting bad news, diagnoses the wistful longing for paradise as a neurosis.

Lobo Antunes maps Portugal as if he were anatomizing a patient on an operating table. In "Knowledge of Hell," he describes its narrow territory, squeezed between Spain and the Atlantic, as "emaciated." The equinoctial east wind along the coast sounds like a wheezing "asthmatic child"; the lisping of waves hints that the ocean suffers from a speech defect; and, in stormier weather, the breakers howl as if tormented by "toothache and heartburn." The tortuous alleys of Lisbon's medieval districts remind Lobo Antunes of aneurisms or distended arteries, and the Manueline decoration of its monuments—a style dating from the reign of King Manuel I, featuring replicas of ropes, anchors, seaweed, and tropical plants as mementos of his explorers—afflict columns with varicose veins.

As such hypochondriac metaphors suggest, Lobo Antunes invests words with the vividness of live, dying things. He also has a canine capacity for deciphering scents. A Gypsy's body odor seems to combine the stench of a mule and the aroma of thistle soup; a disgruntled wife creeps into bed with a "grave-ready" husband whose personal aroma is that of "dead sheep." Any intimacy risks an encounter with someone else's olfactory halo. A kiss, chemically analyzed by Lobo Antunes, turns out to be redolent of "bleach and stew." Meals are predictably unpalatable, like a stomach-turning dish of squid, which is a tangled mess of legs and suckers, with "pallid and fibrous meat" afloat in an inky sauce.

Sharing the morbid exhilaration of Lobo Antunes, the characters in his novels can't help wondering at the creativity of their bodies—so keen to spawn diseases, so foully fruitful. A woman in "The Natural Order of Things," graced with the glorious name of Dona Orquidea, is dismayed when her doctor announces that her kidney stones have dissolved. She wills herself to produce more, hoping to deposit a sliver of mica or a granite chip in her chamber pot. The geological substance of Portugal hardens inside her as she vows "to make cliffs grow in my belly, cliffs like those in Viana, covered with tenacious grass, cliffs like those along the Douro River, with terraced vineyards and the streambed glistening below." Those terraces along the Douro, east of Oporto, are where the grapes crushed for port wine grow, but Lobo Antunes has no interest in Portugal's delicious produce. Dona Orquidea plods patriotically home to transform herself "into a mountain range of schist, into stratified slate, into basaltic formations."

Intent on tabulating symptoms and issuing doleful prognoses, Lobo Antunes hardly ministers to the reader's sense of physical well-being. Satirists, like doctors, investigate our distempers, but they would rather kill than cure. Lobo Antunes ruefully acknowledges his failures as a healer. In "The Fat Man and Infinity," he allows a patient to tell him, "You'd better make an appointment with yourself then, doctor"; he takes the advice, but the waiting list is so long that it will be many months before he finds the time to treat himself. Another Lobo Antunes protagonist equates doctors with morticians or taxidermists. "To many doctors there is something comforting in death, something of validation," he says. They "enjoy death's immobility, its dignified quietness." Art too, fussing over pictorial appearances or fancy verbal replicas, is the connoisseurship of cadavers.

"I wish someone could explain to me

why nothing in this country ever changes," a character in "The Inquisitors' Manual" moans. Fado singers paraphrase this complaint when they air lovelorn grievances; the same choral lament can be heard everywhere in Portugal, as people wonder why their new freedoms and the shiny electronic gadgets they can now afford haven't made them any happier. But if this were the whole truth, Lobo Antunes would remain a local, even a provincial, writer. Luckily, he has a remedy for the national malaise; true, nothing changes, but everything metamorphoses when described by Lobo Antunes, whose style triumphantly flouts the stagnation of his society. His most gleefully outrageous inventions waive physical laws and challenge the dreary natural order of things, and it is this quality that gives his work an appeal that extends beyond the borders of his country. A widowed engineer falls in love with a mannequin he sees in a shopwindow and pays a prostitute to sleep with it. A genial lunatic flaps his arms and takes flight, like the storks that used to nest on chimneys in Portuguese villages. On another occasion, Lisbon commits suicide, its "slit veins bleeding bronze generals, pigeons and dairy bars into the Tagus." Death, as always for Lobo Antunes, is life arrested and arranged into a picture, and postmortem decay produces poetry as delicate as lace or cobwebs. A shop selling woollen goods is taken over by moths, which multiply into white-winged angels and litter the counters with wriggling larvae; these gluttonous seraphs reduce synthetic fabrics to "a skeleton of threads, a ribwork of filaments, fringes of veins."

"Hatred is vital to good health," a character declares in "Act of the Damned." As a medical diagnosis, this seems questionable, but in Lobo Antunes's case it is a prescription for fine, furious, often spectacularly excessive writing. Hatred, in his attitude toward Portugal, may be a synonym for a rankling, incurable love. The tottering country is Lobo Antunes's subject, and as a physician he considers it to be his personal responsibility. How can a doctor give up on a patient who has been ill—tantalizingly near death, though never quite ready to die—for the past four hundred years? ♦

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BRIEFLY NOTED

Lost Classics in Translation

Every Man Dies Alone, *by Hans Fallada, translated from the German by Michael Hofmann (Melville House; $27).* Fallada wrote this novel in twenty-four days in 1947, the last year of his life; he was addicted to drugs and alcohol, and had just been released from a Nazi insane asylum. The story is based on that of an actual working-class Berlin couple who conducted a three-year resistance campaign against the Nazis, by leaving anonymous postcards at random locations around the city. The book has the suspense of a John le Carré novel, and offers a visceral, chilling portrait of the distrust that permeated everyday German life during the war. Especially interesting are the details that show how Nazi-run charities and labor organizations monitored and made public the degree to which individuals supported or eschewed their cause. The novel shows how acts that at the time might have seemed "ridiculously small," "discreet," and "out of the way" could have profound and lasting meaning.

Wandering Stars, *by Sholem Aleichem, translated from the Yiddish by Aliza Shevrin (Viking; $29.95).* Best known for his stories of Tevye the Milkman, a character later brought to Broadway in "Fiddler on the Roof," Sholem Aleichem was a Russian humorist sometimes referred to as "the Jewish Mark Twain." In this romantic epic, previously available only in an abridgment, two lovers are enraptured when the Shchupak-Murovchik Yiddish theatre troupe arrives in their impoverished town, and they resolve to escape shtetl life and run off with the actors. Their gruelling journey takes them across continents and ends on New York's Lower East Side, capturing, with whimsy and pathos, the experience of the Jewish diaspora at the beginning of the twentieth century. As one of the lovers tells the other the night they first meet, "Stars do not fall, stars wander."

The Rider on the White Horse, *by Theodor Storm, translated from the German by James Wright (New York Review Books; $15.95).* The novella was a form beloved of nineteenth-century Germans, who favored the spooky variety. This, from 1888, is one of the greats. Hauke Haien, a young Frisian man, builds a new dike for his town, to shield it from the furies of the North Sea. The townspeople are against him; in the end, so is God, or nature. Like other novellas, "The Rider" is short on psychology but long on atmosphere; no one has ever described storms like Storm. (Hauke on his white horse, gazing at the sea: "Where was the other shore? He stood there face to face with sheer mountains of water.") Hauke is defeated. Yet in the dark and stormy night outside the inn where this tale is told around the hearth, a ghost rider gallops past on a ghostly white horse. Storm is neglected. This republication of Wright's gorgeous translation, with a selection of Storm's other stories, should correct that.

Armenian Golgotha, *by Grigoris Balakian, translated from the Armenian by Peter Balakian (Knopf; $35).* On the night of April 24, 1915, Grigoris Balakian, an Armenian priest, and more than two hundred other Armenian politicians and intellectuals were arrested in Constantinople. Soon, Armenians across Turkey were massacred or forced to join a death march to the desert of Der Zor. Balakian walked among the displaced for months before he fled, disguising himself variously as a German engineer, a soldier, and a worker in the vineyards; he began this book while in hiding. (It was published in Armenian in 1922 and in 1959; the translator is Balakian's great-nephew.) Both a memoir and an attempt at a history of the genocide, it assumes considerable familiarity with Ottoman politics, but remains fascinating first-hand testimony to a monumental crime.

THE ART WORLD

ALIEN EMOTIONS

Pictures art revisited.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

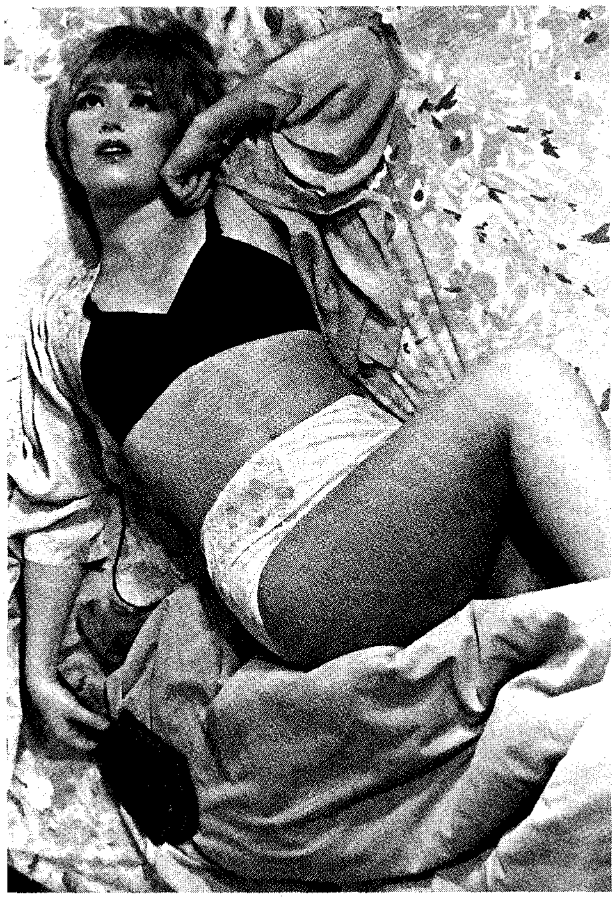
"The Pictures Generation," at the Metropolitan Museum, revisits a hothouse orchid of an avant-garde that sprouted in art schools in the nineteen-seventies and, by 1984 (the cutoff date for works in the show), had withered in the chill winds of the New York art world. The movement's vastly influential signature method was appropriation: the filching or the imitation of existing images, to sabotage and/or revel in their rhetorical contrivance. Born of recessionary, disenchanted times, Pictures art shared menacingly cynical attitudes toward mainstream culture with punk rock, in night-life venues, and with deconstructionist lucubration, in academe. It yawed between those poles: sardonic burlesque and stilted critique. If any single work in the Met show could stand for all, it would be one of a series executed with minimal labor, in 1979, by the artist Sherrie Levine: fashion ads from glossy magazines trimmed to the contours of the profiled heads of George Washington or Abraham Lincoln, and framed. Looking at them, you register the sainted Presidents and the soignée models—and the forms of silhouette and of color photography—in stuttering alternation. Your brain can't grasp both at once. Nor can your heart. The images aren't neutral. They come loaded with political and social associations, bearing on notions of "America." With diabolical efficiency, Levine thus made good on a claim commonly advanced for Pictures art: spurring consciousness of how, and to what ends, representations affect us. Let it be noted that these works do nothing else. As slight and as brittle as they are pure, they demonstrate the limits of critical knowingness as an artistic strategy. The rest of "The Pictures Generation"—photographs, paintings, drawings, collages, installations, sound pieces, films, and videos, plus books, magazines, and ephemera—is comparatively slipshod, though often arresting and occasionally fun. In the unique case of the self-photographer Cindy Sherman, it is transcendent.

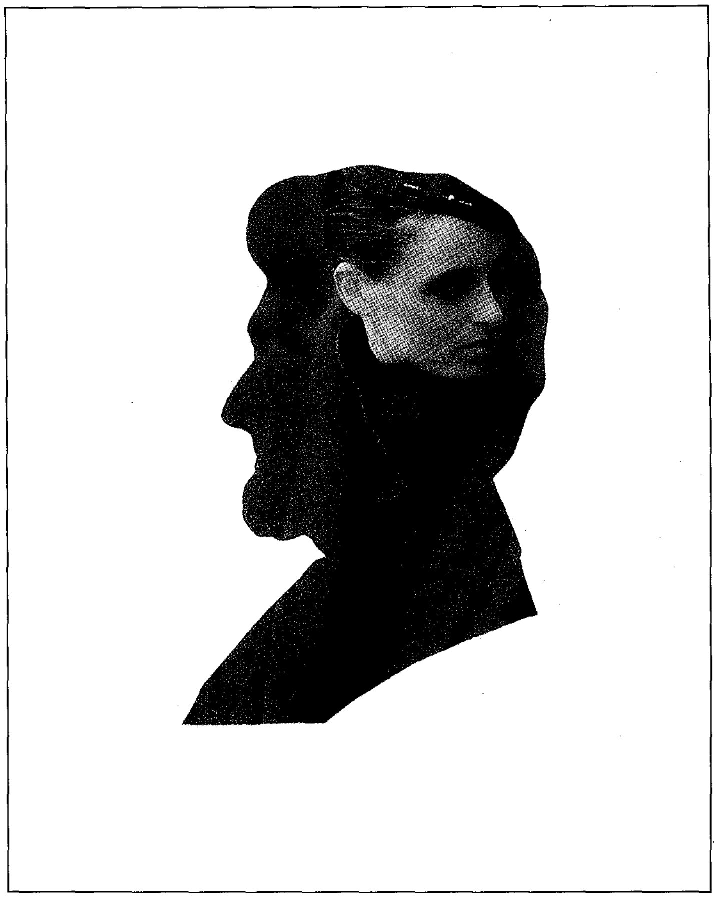
Mounted by the Met's associate curator of photography, Douglas Eklund, in the museum's newly spacious photography galleries, the show is largely a story of two gangs of artists that convened in New York. It was plainly heaven, in the SoHo of the late nineteen-seventies, to have been a student at the California Institute of the Arts or the State University of New York at Buffalo. CalArts kids were mentored by the conceptualist and legendary teacher John Baldessari, who, among other assignments, instructed pairs of students to film themselves performing snippets of scripts from old movies. (A projected compilation of the results, "Script," made between 1973 and 1977), evokes an era smitten with the freeze-dried passions of Jean-Luc Godard.) The CalArts star was David Salle, who later gained renown as a painter—a chief colleague and a rival of the paladin of American neo-Expressionism, Julian Schnabel—after breaking ranks with his mostly painting-averse peers. Early works by Salle in the Met show, including a svelte and spooky installation of unnerving photographs (a sneering galoot in a racecar, bare-breasted female African dancers), sentimental music, and flashing lights, well described by Eklund as "like a church of someone else's religion," are a revelation. The Buffalo cohort had a student couple at its core: Sherman, who entertained friends by showing up at gatherings in disguise, and Robert Longo, who was given to movie-inspired icons of macho melodrama. Coming independently to the movement were the stalwarts Richard Prince (a versatile prankster who made an early hit with reproduced Marlboro cigarette ads), Barbara Kruger (with brilliantly crafted feminist agitprop), and Levine (a scandalous success with re-photographed photographs by Edward Weston and Walker Evans, which needled the mystiques of originality and authorship in art). The photographer Louise Lawler merits special mention for her cold-eyed shots of expensive art works in overdecorated apartments—as wince-makingly pitiless as the assessment of a privileged youth, home from college, of his or her parents' taste. For highly comic relief, there are videos by the gifted performance artist Michael Smith, whose "Baby Ikki" (1978) cast him as a diapered tyke crawling on a sidewalk and toddling out into traffic in lower Manhattan, to the amusement of passersby and the dudgeon of a police officer obliged to hustle him—none too gently—out of harm's way. Eklund writes that Ikki stood for the fix of a generation "infantilized as part of their induction into the mainstream of American culture." Be that as it may, he's a hoot.

I missed "Pictures," a movement-initiating, instantly legendary group show, curated by the critic Douglas Crimp, at the public-funded gallery Artists Space, in the autumn of 1977. Levine and Longo were in it; Salle, Sherman, and Prince were not. It was a tentative affair, most telling in short films by the Californian Jack Goldstein: the M-G-M lion incessantly aroar, a trained German shepherd barking on cue. Works by Longo foretold his later big drawings, from staged photographs of chicly clad citizens apparently being hit by fatal bullets, which became virtual logos of the New Wave in art; three of those saturnine tableaux temporarily grace the Met's lobby. But the alien sensibility that the show heralded was soon unavoidable: a precociously brainy mood in art that was fronted, rather than followed, by critical talking points. "Postmodernism" was the password. Critics—including Crimp, Craig Owens, and Hal Foster (the editor of a 1983 anthology forthrightly titled "The Anti-Aesthetic")—who were influenced by Rosalind Krauss, the Columbia professor and a co-editor of the academic journal *October*, vied for prestige with the artists, whom they rather gingerly promoted. The artists turned out to be unherdable—as artists, like cats, generally are. Several joined Salle on a bandwagon of painting that had been set rolling by a resuscitated art market and by fresh styles spawned in Italy (which proved transitory) and Germany (which

LEFT: COURTESY CINDY SHERMAN/METRO PICTURES; RIGHT: COURTESY MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, LOS ANGELES

did not). As a phenomenon of fashion, Pictures art blurred into a katzenjammer scene of graffiti, club performance, do-it-yourself film and video, and all-around youthful effrontery on the Lower East Side. I deemed the Pictures artists too strainingly smart to be durable until I was stunned by a show, in 1982, of wide-screen-format color photographs by Sherman, in which she posed as variously anxious or stupefied vulnerable women in cinematically composed and lit solitude. Here was something really new (one-frame movies, Hitchcockian in their expertly managed intensity) and at the same time old (painting-like inventions, with a nuanced imagination and a visual beauty redolent of Old Masters up to and including Rembrandt).





Cindy Sherman's "Untitled Film Still (#6)," from 1977, and Sherrie Levine's "Untitled (President: 5)," from 1979.

Real Life, the name of a low-budget magazine co-founded in 1979 by the painter (and now the dean of Cal-Arts) Thomas Lawson, apostrophized the Pictures world view. It was aggressively ironic. Nothing could so curl the lip of a self-respecting intellectual in that milieu as any assertion of "reality" independent of texts and images, which—in buzzwords of French philosophy—were understood to "construct" consciousness by way of "simulations" in "a forest of signs." ("As we know," Foster wrote, in 1982, "the real cannot be apprehended directly: we have only (mis)representations of it.") "Life" wasn't in particularly good odor, either. In 1979, Salle published a personal manifesto titled, with bleak satisfaction, "The Paintings Are Dead." Not that the artists were deep thinkers. As members of a generation steeped in mass media and nurtured in graduate education, and following the general collapse of established values in the sixties and of revolutionary idealism thereafter, they thrilled to suggestions that their automatic sophistication could see through, and dissipate, the antediluvian authority of their elders. But they suffered, too, from a loss of credible traditions that had made life seem real and reality seem livable. Many works in "The Pictures Generation" exude a melancholy of clever artifice masking inexpressible emotion. Such was a conscious goal for Sherman, who stated in 1982 that she wanted "that choked-up feeling in your throat which maybe comes from despair or teary-eyed sentimentality." (Having succeeded, she would go on to explore other recognizable states and conditions of experience.) Goldstein's dutifully barking dog and Longo's stricken citizens convey double binds of excitement and constriction. Dour nudes in early paintings by Salle hint at sexual obsessions drained of sensuality—let alone love or even liking. Ever elegantly wistful, Levine touched a nerve, familiar to artists who envy the past, with handmade, faithful copies of reproductions of modern art works, like rubbings of an Aladdin's lamp that should, but won't, disgorge a genie in service to the heart's desire. The show catches these and other poignancies on the fly. The Pictures moment was brief, but it vibrates, still. ♦

From the Boston Globe Magazine.

I should have been angry—or embarrassed myself—but instead I was oddly flattered. His memory of me was of a wonton seductress who owned her sexuality, a far cry from the shy 19-year-old I had really been.

A recollection that could land him in the soup.

DANCING

TWOS AND THREES

Works by Merce Cunningham and Karole Armitage.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

At the beginning of Merce Cunningham's "Nearly Ninety," which had its première on April 16th—his ninetieth birthday—at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, thirteen dancers came out in unitards (by Romeo Gigli) that had black sections laid over white. Some dancers had one white arm and one black; some had a swath of black over a white breastbone; others, charmingly, had a black buttock operating next to a white one. I think that this was a frank symbol of what Cunningham has always aimed for: a cross between abstraction and feeling, math and flesh.

Because our minds are so much more drawn to stories and pictures than to abstraction, Cunningham makes a special effort to right the balance, add vinegar to the oil. In "Nearly Ninety," the excellent Daniel Madoff does a vaulting run across the stage. That could be read as happiness, right? So Cunningham punctuates the leaps with an odd, spasmodic move. Holley Farmer, the company's senior woman, stands in a majestic still pose; then she breaks the spell by suddenly dropping her head to the side. For those who love Cunningham's work, this recoil from sentimentality—the insistence on the pre-psychological character of dance—is a big part of what they love. And for those who dislike his work it's probably what they dislike most. It's also the reason that Cunningham is so hard to write about. Until 2004, when Roger Copeland published his "Merce Cunningham: The Modernizing of Modern Dance," there was no critical book on this artist who has been recognized as a master for close to a half century.

But Cunningham's dances do have emotional meaning. "Nearly Ninety" consists mostly of solos, duets, and trios. The solos are the least interesting part. They are there, I suspect, to please the dancers, to give each of them the spotlight for a moment. The duets are the most compelling. As in ballet, which Cunningham's work resembles, the woman dominates and the man supports her. She holds onto his arm and goes through the journey of her steps. Very often, she tips, forfeiting her balance, and the man steadies her. In doing so, she is putting a question to him, and to life. How many chances can I take? How long can you hold me? Often, a duet will be doubled (or as much as quintupled). Somewhere else on the stage, another pair of dancers will be doing roughly the same steps, but facing a different way or employing a different timing. These half rhymes reduce the emotional temperature and raise the formal excitement.

The trios—most of them for two men and a woman—are less intimate than the duets. I think they represent experimentation: *Homo ludens*, humankind at play. Here, because the woman has double support, she can do fantastic things. The men hold her as she tips over almost to the floor. They raise her above their heads and carry her off like a canoe. The three are trying out what the body can do. Their faces are expressionless, but the effect of these trios is often cheering, bracing, the more so because, with three, romance is not in the picture. The dancers are not in love; they are a club.

"Nearly Ninety" is very tidy. Much of it, perhaps most, is based on attitude. In this step, the dancer balances on one leg and sticks the other, bent at the knee, into the air. (If you have seen Giambologna's statue of Mercury in the Bargello, in Florence, or the copy of it that tops the big fountain in the National Gallery, in Washington, D.C., he's in attitude.) In "Nearly Ninety," the dancers go through every single kind of attitude there is: front, side, back; high, low; standing, jumping, turning, sitting, kneeling. Sometimes, they add fondu; that is, they bend not just the raised leg but also the supporting leg, creating a lovely, dynamic sight, like a horse trotting.

The set for "Nearly Ninety," by the Italian architect Benedetta Tagliabue, was a fright. Behind the dancers stood a sort of silver house, twenty-two feet tall, which looked as though someone had glued a bunch of poles together while drunk. This thing might have been O.K.—at least it gave the musicians a place to sit—but soon Tagliabue began lighting it with Popsicle colors and plastering it with videos (by Franc Aleu): shots of upside-down body parts, or of globby stuff that looked like the contents of a Lava lamp. It's possible that Cunningham doesn't pick his set designers anymore. In his youth, he was friends with Robert Rauschenberg and other big-time painters of the period, and those men did his décors for him. (From 1954 to 1964, Rauschenberg was the company's resident designer, responsible not only for sets but for costumes and lighting as well. He was sometimes the stage manager, too. Jasper Johns served as an artistic adviser to the troupe from 1967 to 1980.) Now most of Cunningham's early collaborators are gone. I suspect that, at ninety, he may want to save his strength for making the dance, and let his staff worry about the mise-en-scène. In any case, Tagliabue's set was not only unrelated but actually hostile to this sober and unified dance.

By contrast, the music, by John Paul Jones, Takehisa Kosugi (the company's music director), and Sonic Youth, was exactly the kind of thing that Cunningham has always favored: the noise-is-music variety, spearheaded in the midcentury by John Cage (who was Cunningham's partner for fifty years) and soon drawing in many others. But this score had none of the virtues of that school: the wit of Cage, the vigor of David Tudor. It was simply ugly and trifling.

I have never got used to Cunningham's music, or, despite my respect for his anti-sentimentalism, to his related rejection of classical form—the fact that he jumbles the parts of his dances, in order to forestall development and climax, which he apparently thinks are corny. (Climax, he once said, is for those who get excited over New Year's Eve.)

On the other hand, by now I can't imagine him otherwise. For his anti-classicism and his anti-lyricism, together with his more ingratiating qualities, notably the cleanness and intensity of his dances, he will always be recognized as the foremost representative of high modernism—the Joyce-Pound-Beckett kind—in the history of modern dance, and as a creator of beauty and meaning on their level. On opening night, there was a little ceremony after the show, and Cunningham came out onstage in a wheelchair, wearing a black velvet jacket, black sneakers, and an embarrassed smile. He told a story about how, as a young man in Centralia, Washington, he overheard his parents discussing his curious notion that he might have a career in dance. Could he ever make a living? his mother asked. His father said, "That fellow, if he didn't have the dance game, would be a crook." They let him go ahead.

In March, at the Kitchen, Karole Armitage put on a show, "Think Punk!," that consisted mainly of shortened versions of the dances that made her such a hot ticket in the nineteen-eighties: "Drastic-Classicism" (1981), "The Watteau Duets" (1985), and "Wild Thing" (an excerpt from the 1987 "Gogo Ballerina"). It was wonderful to get another look at them. Armitage danced in Cunningham's company for five years, from 1976 to 1981. Like Cunningham, she began as part of a general, cross-arts avant-garde, and she became a hit partly because of her collaboration with people such as David Salle, Rhys Chatham, Jeff Koons, David Linton. Like Cunningham, she favored high-level virtuosity and inscrutable emotions. She also favored ballet, and here the connection is more with Balanchine than with Cunningham. Together with her age-mates, she went in for "appropriation," and there are many frank borrowings from Balanchine in her work.

But Armitage (b. 1954) is much younger than Cunningham (b. 1919), not to speak of Balanchine (1904-83). Their period was modernism. Hers is postmodernism, or, when she started out, punk: the grating, the loud, and the repetitious. Her sexual politics are also of that time. Her women wear five-inch spikes. They do supported splits *en face*—that is, a man lifts the woman and she, facing us squarely, spreads her legs wide open. Balanchine, too, used that step (he may have been the first), but sparingly, and when his women did it they looked grave, as if they knew where love would take them. For Armitage's women, by contrast, the *en-face* split is almost a default position, and when they perform it they wiggle their legs with pleasure. Sex is not going to hurt them. They may not even do it; they may just think about it. (In a lot of Armitage's dances, the man seems to be presented as gay.) These splits were not just political; they opened up a new design territory. The woman could now use her whole body, all her geometry. And, of course, they were shocking, which was fun.

JULIETA CERVANTES

Bennyroyce Royon and Megumi Eda perform Armitage's "Watteau Duets."

What I wish for Armitage now is that she would put shock behind her. Already in the nineteen-eighties she knew how to modulate it. The tremendous "Watteau Duets," which she made for herself and another Cunningham veteran, the smoldering Joseph Lennon, had everything a postmodernist could ask for—kinky clothes, bad manners, irony—and yet the dance eventually stopped being naughty and became tense, thoughtful, intimate. She gave us something similar in her 2004 "Time Is the Echo of an Axe Within a Wood," but the piece she is working on now, "Mashup" (we got an excerpt in this concert), looks like a return to the joys of brashness. I hope not. ♦

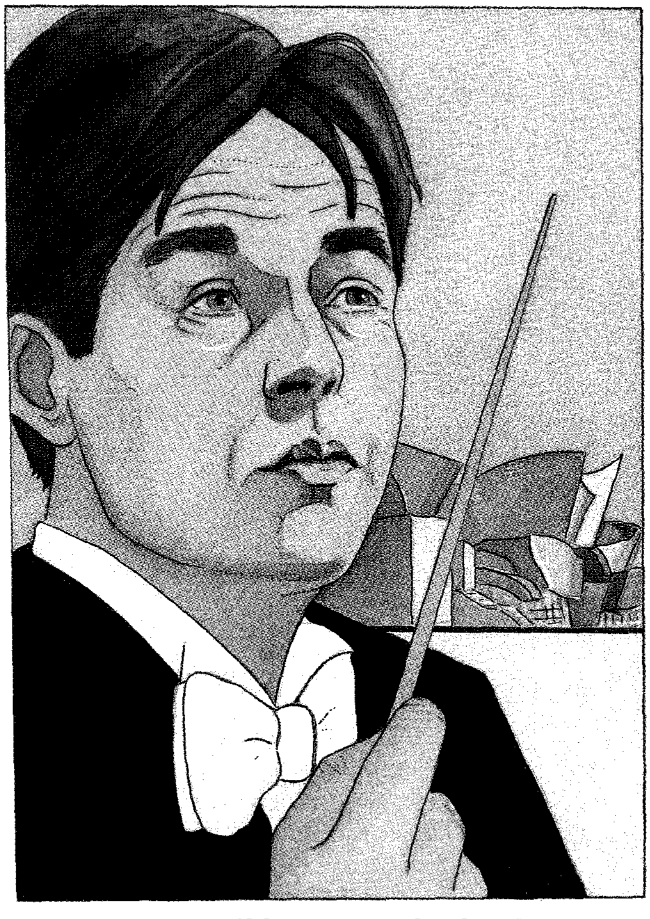
MUSICAL EVENTS

ADIEU

Esa-Pekka Salonen ends his reign at the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

BY ALEX ROSS

When Esa-Pekka Salonen began rehearsing for his début with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, in 1984, he introduced himself to the orchestra with these somewhat unpromising words: "I suppose that you know the Lutosławski notation." On the program was Witold Lutosławski's Third Symphony, a formidable score that periodically directs the musicians to play fragments of melody at their own pace, in episodes of controlled chaos. At that moment, it would have been difficult to guess that the soft-spoken, serious-minded Salonen—a twenty-six-year-old Finn with an avant-garde bent—would become not only the longest-serving music director in the Philharmonic's history but also a driving force in American music.


Salonen makes himself the medium rather than the message.

LARA TOMLIN

During a seventeen-year tenure, Salonen gave his orchestra a high international profile, refined its sound, added more than two hundred works to its repertory, introduced a cluster of masterpieces (including several major scores of his own), and presided over the opening of Walt Disney Concert Hall, maintaining all the while a self-effacing sense of humor. He said goodbye on April 19th, with transfixing performances of Stravinsky's "Oedipus Rex" and "Symphony of Psalms." If his first day in L.A. was muted, his last was tumultuous. When the final columnar chord faded from the air, the audience began an ovation that went on for fifteen minutes, while members of the orchestra crowded around the conductor to hug him and thank him. The display of emotion was all the more striking because Salonen did nothing to beg for it. Most conductors depart in a blaze of fortissimo glory; this one tried almost to steal away.

Salonen turned the Los Angeles Philharmonic into the most intellectually lively orchestra in America. Circa 1992, classical-music bigwigs held that orchestras were essentially museums of past glories, and that attempts to modernize them had no hope of enduring success. Salonen arrived with the conviction that twentieth-century and contemporary fare might not only cease to be an obstacle but even become a draw. There were difficulties early on; boos resounded through the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion when he led the Lutosławski in 1984, and protests simmered during the early years of his directorship. But he won over skeptics with the clarity of his vision, the steadiness of his direction, and the charm of his explications. In recent years, new works have attracted some of the most avid crowds. Along the way, Salonen had much help from Frank Gehry, whose gleaming design for Disney Hall demanded a more up-to-date repertory, and from two exceptionally canny executives, Ernest Fleischmann and Deborah Borda. Ultimately, though, the metamorphosis of the Philharmonic was Salonen's doing, and he thereby gained a place among the visionary conductors of American musical history—the likes of Leopold Stokowski, Serge Koussevitzky, and Leonard Bernstein.

Salonen's valedictory programs, imaginatively conceived and immaculately executed, captured the essence of his achievement. On April 7th, he presented a concert in the orchestra's long-running new-music series, "Green Umbrella," which, over three decades, has grown from a sparsely attended specialty offering to a mainstream attraction that routinely fills the better part of Disney Hall. There were four world premières, all from composers under the age of forty: Enrico Chapela, Anna Clyne, Erin Gee, and Fang Man. Chapela and Clyne had the strongest impact. Chapela's "Li Po" makes virtuosic use of unconventional instrumental sounds—multiphonics, bowed percussion, glissando everywhere—and envelops them in voluptuous electronic textures. Yet the work is more than an onslaught of effects: tendrils of melody curl around the ear, harmonic colors glow eerily bright, rhythms have a folkish, danceable thrust. (The Philharmonic will surely commission Chapela to write a piece for Salonen's successor, the volcanic young Venezuelan conductor Gustavo Dudamel.) Clyne's "Within Her Arms," in stark contrast, is a fragile elegy for fifteen strings; intertwining voices of lament bring to mind English Renaissance masterpieces of Thomas Tallis and John Dowland, although the music occasionally breaks down into spells of static grief, with violins issuing broken cries over shuddering double-bass drones. Salonen, in including these incisively individual scores in his farewell series, sent the message that the Philharmonic should stay committed to the cause of the new. The Esa-Pekka Salonen Commissions Fund, which has amassed more than one and a half million dollars, will carry on that cause after he leaves.

At a Philharmonic concert two nights later, Salonen offered a big new work of his own: the Violin Concerto, written for the fearless young virtuoso Leila Josefowicz. When Salonen announced that he was giving up the Los Angeles job, he said that he wanted to devote more time to composing, and the strength of his latest pieces suggests that he has not made a foolish choice. (His other conducting gig, at the Philharmonia Orchestra, in London, takes less of his time.) Salonen the composer is more openly expressive than Salonen the conductor; on a new Deutsche Grammophon recording, you can hear his Piano Concerto, which rivals the Romantic showpieces of yesteryear in its brash gestures and lush textures.

The Violin Concerto is a more contemplative piece, perhaps the most personal that he has yet composed. According to a program note, it is a kind of musical memoir, with movements suggesting the wondering gaze of a solitary newcomer ("Mirage"), the late-night reveries of a husband and father ("Pulse I"), urban forays with a rock-and-roll beat ("Pulse II"), and a rich, long goodbye ("Adieu"). Josefowicz had the arduous task of standing in for Salonen's questing self; out of two hundred and fourteen bars in the first movement, the violinist plays busily for two hundred and two. The up-tempo sections generate heat—at one point, a percussionist is instructed to "go crazy"—but what lingers is the bittersweet lyricism of the ending: the violin floats up into the highest reaches of its range, tuned gongs and a harp spell out a faintly chilling ostinato pattern (ticktock, ticktock), the strings unfold a featherbed of memories, and the orchestra comes to rest on a sweetly dissonant chord. Time is running out, the composer seems to say, and I must be going.

Salonen's concerto appeared between György Ligeti's "Clocks and Clouds," an iridescent tone poem for female voices and reduced orchestra, and Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. One of Salonen's signal gifts as a conductor is his flair for teasing a narrative thread from an eclectic program, so that works from disparate worlds seem mysteriously interconnected. Ligeti, a composer with a cerebral reputation, became in Salonen's hands an unrestrained sensualist: voices and woodwinds exchanged whispery intimacies, the sound levitating upward in Disney's magical acoustical space. And Beethoven's Fifth became an exercise in intellectual obsession, the familiarity of the music undercut by surprising emphases and a pulse-quickening array of tempos. Salonen's concerto fell somewhere between Ligeti's fantastical sphere and Beethoven's muscular reality, with the dream life winning out.

It made sense that Salonen, in his final performance, turned to the music of Stravinsky, whose cool façade and hidden passions match his own artistic temperament. If "Oedipus" and the "Symphony of Psalms" had been heard purely as music, they would have left a sufficiently deep impression; the crystalline harmonies were precisely balanced, the rhythms were choreographed with balletic grace, and a transcendent atmosphere descended in the closing section of Psalm 150, the "Laudate Dominum." But this Stravinsky double bill also turned out to be a potent theatrical experience, thanks to the direction of Peter Sellars, who worked with Salonen on two of his most memorable Philharmonic projects, a Salzburg Festival production of Messiaen's "St. Francis" and a Disney Hall staging of "Tristan und Isolde." Sellars seldom goes wrong when he addresses religious subjects; he approaches them with a kind of devotional irreverence, jettisoning dogma and exposing the spiritual core. In "Oedipus," he set aside the arch narration that Jean Cocteau created for Stravinsky's score and replaced it with recitations after Sophocles. The "Symphony of Psalms," in Sellars's conception, becomes a redemptive epilogue to Sophocles' tragedy, the musical ritual accompanying Oedipus' quasi-mystical death at Colonus. There was an intriguingly seamless transition from Greek-pagan to Latin-Christian imagery: the common link was the power of humility in the face of destruction.

The amplification of the singers was a little rough—Disney oddly lacks a first-class sound system—but everything else fell into place. The Los Angeles Master Chorale delivered the choruses with a mightily focussed tone. The actress Viola Davis, recently noted for her performance as a desperate mother in the film "Doubt," delivered the narrations with explosively clear diction and finely tuned rage. Rodrick Dixon made for an affectingly plaintive Oedipus, Anne Sofie von Otter a fiercely grand Jocasta. Thrones and masks by the Ethiopian artist Elias Simé provided an austere scenic background; James Ingalls, the lighting designer, signalled the moment of redemption with a dramatic shift from forbidding shadows to exalting light. In the midst of it all, you somehow found yourself forgetting about the man who was supposed to be the center of attention. Unlike so many members of the maestro species, Salonen wants most of all to get out of the way of the music, to make himself the medium rather than the message. The Stravinsky program seemed almost a magnificent evasion.

The crowd at Disney found itself in the paradoxical position of shedding tears for a detached, contained, low-key guy. That's why the emotion welled up so strongly during the ovation: it was time for the reluctant maestro to receive the lionization that was his due. Salonen kept dragging out his collaborators, until rhythmic clapping from the audience required that he take a solo bow. When he walked out alone, the Philharmonic brass players saluted him with a fanfare, and the violinists and violists, who had not played in the "Symphony of Psalms," returned to the stage, some of the women holding flowers. It is exceedingly rare to see orchestral musicians exhibiting feelings onstage, especially feelings for conductors; the code of the profession demands a poker face under almost all circumstances. Salonen's farewell forced a breakdown of the code, to the point that out-of-towners felt as if they were intruding on a private affair. Salonen beamed, blushed, cried a little, and mouthed a phrase that looked like "Let's go get a drink." There was sadness in the air, but you couldn't get too hung up on it. This was the story of a man who took on a complex job, made all the right moves, and departed in an uncommonly elegant way. You don't read that story often. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

MEN OF MYSTERY

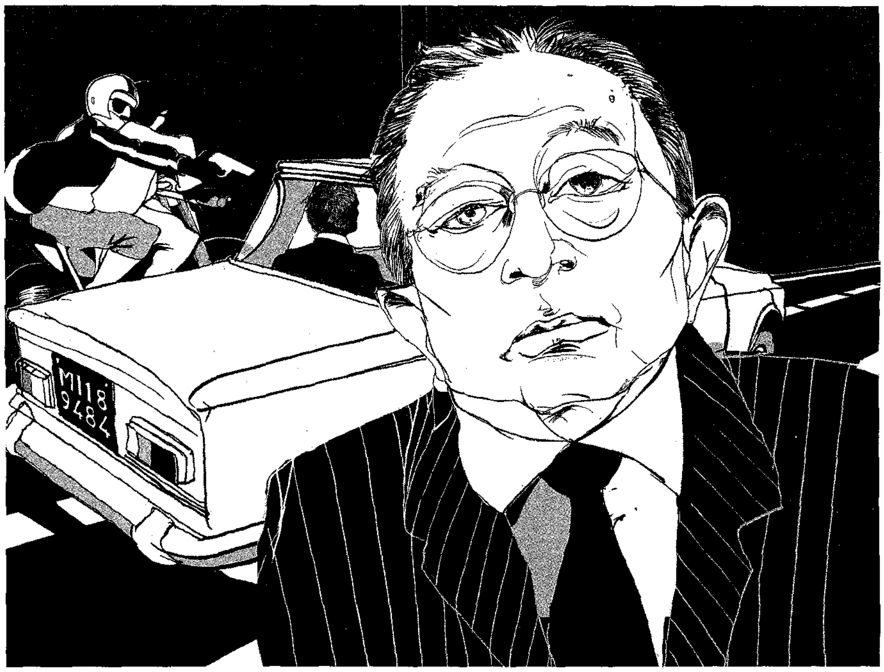
"Il Divo" and "The Limits of Control."

BY ANTHONY LANE

What kind of man reads a mystery story but rips out the page on which the villain is about to be unmasked? Who, in other words, prefers eternal suspense to the vulgar éclat of resolution? The answer, according to "Il Divo," is Giulio Andreotti: seven times Prime Minister of Italy, bedrock of the Christian Democrats, and still a senator, at the age of ninety. As incarnated here, right down to the strangely folded tips of his ears, by Toni Servillo, he seems omnipresent, barely sentient, and quite possibly immortal.

The action slides between decades, but, to start with, we join Andreotti at the forging of his final administration, in 1991, with colleagues arriving to pay homage as he gets a shave. The writer and director, Paolo Sorrentino, has fun—perhaps too much—with the arrival of this gang, each of whom has an onscreen title with his nickname. One is "Lemon," another "The Shark," and so on; the master of the nation's finances, a dapper little Machiavel by the name of Paolo Cirino Pomicino (Carlo Buccirosso), rolls up with a sumptuous beauty on each wing, plainly unbothered by any effect they might have on his rate of inflation. All this softens us up for the unsurprising revelation, later in the film, that Andreotti was no stranger to the workings of the Mafia. He himself denied that he was ever in the Mob's embrace, but whether or not that was so—and we see him greeted with a kiss by the hoggish *capo di capi*—matters less to Sorrentino than the aroma of clannishness that wafts through every room in the mansion of Italian society. Whether Andreotti is receiving the plaudits of a delegation from the Vatican, or bestowing coffee and cash on his constituents in saintly reticence, as he does every Sunday, or, weirdest of all, holding court at a dance party, enthroned immobile on a sofa while everybody gyrates around him, we sense an unspoken rite of conduct that is as clearly understood, and obeyed, by those in the know as it is walled off to anyone else.

As a result, there is much plotting in this movie, but no plot. Now and then, Sorrentino tosses violent events in our path. Some viewers will complain that "Il Divo" thickens into opacity at such moments, but, on reflection, I'm not sure that we are *meant* to make sense of the furor. To this day, for instance, nobody has cracked the conundrum of Roberto Calvi, the Vatican-friendly banker found hanged under Blackfriars Bridge, in London, and "Il Divo" has no wish to propose its own solution. Instead, Sorrentino films the suspended corpse upside down, so that Signor Calvi is made to float like a bulging balloon on the end of a string. As for the slaughter of Giovanni Falcone, a senior investigator of Mafia activity in Palermo, we are shown his bombed car sailing serenely through a clear sky, like the bone hurled heavenward in "2001: A Space Odyssey." I felt uneasy with these elegant scenes, as they made aesthetic sport of the murder of men, but Sorrentino, by his own admission, is not a political filmmaker, as Francesco Rosi, or the young Bertolucci, was. He is more of a choreographer, obsessed with how single gestures, or the slightest motion of the camera, can vouchsafe a precious glimpse into a world of hostility or devotion. If he throws up his hands at the clandestine chaos of the Roman parliament, happy to calibrate its farcical aspects rather than consider its implications for the country's governance, well, are there not millions of his fellow-citizens who adopt the same shrug?



Toni Servillo plays the former Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti.

RICCARDO VECCHIO

In any case, the purpose of the clutter is clear. Once piled up and shunted aside, it allows Sorrentino to approach the central presence of the film. To Italian audiences, Toni Servillo is a figure of substance and variety, the actor-director of a Neapolitan theatre troupe; viewers here know him best as the unflustered (if drug-addicted) businessman in Sorrentino's 2004 feature, "The Consequences of Love," and as the expansively sinful waste merchant in last year's "Gomorrah." He specializes in the affable but unreachable, and his performance as Andreotti is so richly and preposterously enjoyable that you almost feel guilty, at the end, for having savored it to the full, as if you'd spooned too much hare sauce onto your pappardelle. Not that this version of Andreotti has a grain of hedonism. On the contrary, he is one of the few convincing ascetics in recent cinema, not least in the soluble aspirin that he drinks instead of wine. (And what, one longs to know, brought on the migraines that it is supposed to cure?) Offered a cigar, Andreotti demurs, explaining, "Thank you, but I don't succumb to lesser vices," leaving us to ask whether that was, or was not, a confession of grander ones. Early on, we get a masterly shot of our hero as he takes a nighttime walk, down a silent Roman street, with bodyguards loping and prowling by his side. There is something pontifical in his progress, and that same hint of the clerical recurs elsewhere in the way that he holds his hands—fingers steepled, locked together in front of his breast, as if bearing the Host at an invisible Mass. It was Andreotti, we learn, who reportedly said to the Pope, "Excuse me, Your Holiness, but you don't know the Vatican."

Even as his government totters, and the charges of corruption—and, worse still, of conspiracy to murder a journalist—mount against Andreotti (one of these was proven, only to be thrown out on appeal), Sorrentino cannot muster much indignation against his hero, and neither, I'm afraid, could I. Andreotti had many sobriquets in his time, among them Beelzebub, the Salamander, the Fox, and the Divine Giulio, which pairs him with Caesar, but to me he was always pure spider. He made François Mitterrand look like Dan Quayle. There is something monstrously alluring about a man of the world who sees that world as a web of internecine comedy, light on integrity but deep in shadow, with himself perched quietly at its heart. To object to the Red Brigades, the left-wing terrorist group that wrought such havoc in Italy, on the ground that it was "too serious," as Andreotti does—is that gross irresponsibility, or does it cleverly catch the fanatics at their weakest point? And how serious, exactly, is the figure that he himself cuts in this movie? You could dismiss Servillo's portrayal as a cartoon, but the great actors, like the most brazen playwrights (and Servillo has in recent years played leading roles in Molière), know that beneath the dark surface of caricature lies a heightened and vivifying truth, as potent as fortified wine. Consume with great caution, and with joy.

The effect of the new Jim Jarmusch film, "The Limits of Control," is to prove that, however gracefully you groom a shaggy-dog story, it won't stop roaming. Isaach De Bankolé—originally from Ivory Coast, and a Jarmusch regular, in works like "Night on Earth" and "Coffee and Cigarettes"—plays a man with a mission. That sounds decisive, but the man is a nameless itinerant, and you can no more explain his mission than finish a jigsaw under water. Clad in a succession of silk suits, he flies to Madrid, takes a train to Seville, then takes another into rural desolation. In each place, the same thing happens, with minor variations: a contact approaches, launches into a discussion of art, music, drugs, or whatever, and trades matchboxes with our guy. Each box contains a cipher on a slip of paper, which he reads and eats.

The tale is constructed with infinite care, and shot with an almost aching clarity by Christopher Doyle. (Whole theses could, and probably will, be written on its use of blood-orange red.) The cast, too, is so hip that it makes your gums hurt, with cameos for Gael García Bernal, John Hurt, Bill Murray, and a white-wigged Tilda Swinton, whose deployment of a transparent umbrella as a parasol is a typical gesture of stylized futility. As for the young actress Paz de la Huerta, she first appears wearing nothing but a pair of spectacles and a revolver, which I suspect remains Jarmusch's idea of a well-dressed woman. The dialogue is a winking parody of spy talk: "Wait three days until you see the bread. The guitar will find you." Jarmusch fans, in short, will have a ball, and no other director, even now, can match him in his calculation of the offhand. Yet the movie itself, for all its cinematic references (Swinton discourses blankly on "The Lady from Shanghai"), seems impatient with the need to tell a narrative at all, as if its secret wish were to be a photography exhibit, or an album of half-connected songs. The really courageous course of action would have been to stretch it out to a Warholian ten hours, or to let it just fritter away, with a promise of unhelpful sequels to come. As it is, the movie's lethal climax, with its vague protest against corporate control—and hence in favor of art, music, drugs, or whatever—feels like a poor theft from a more conventional film. The best thing about "The Limits of Control" is its portrait of Spanish townscapes, their crystalline modernism intercut with scruffy melancholia; and the smartest option would be to match the director cool for cool and walk out of his lovely, exasperating story with twenty minutes to go, leaving yourself—like Giulio Andreotti and his cut-off mysteries—with only a dream of an end. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
The Front Row, a blog about movies.

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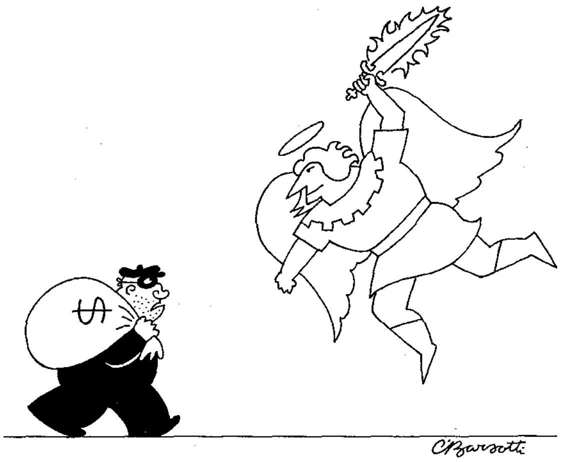
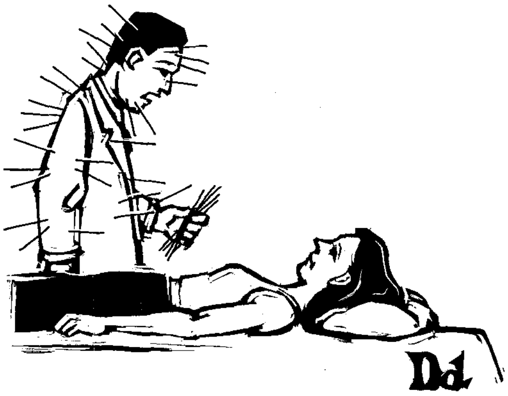
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Farley Katz, must be received by Sunday, May 3rd. Finalists in the April 20th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the May 18th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Trust me—you don't want this. It's filled with mortgage-backed securities."
Francesca DelGuidice, New York City



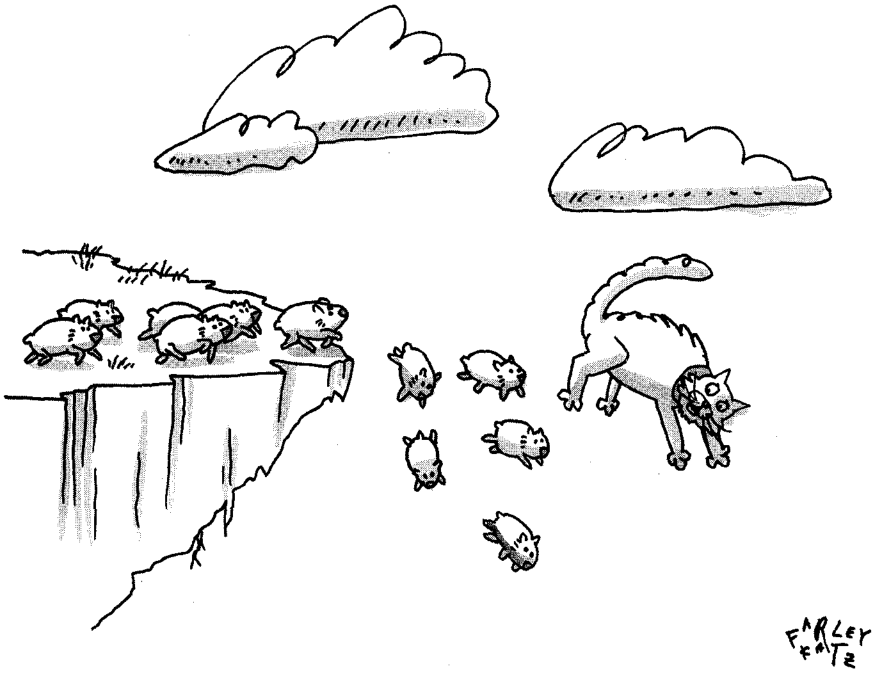
THE FINALISTS

"Gesundheit."
Bob Vogel, Portland, Maine

"Congratulations—it's a porcupine."
Simon Fraser, Philadelphia, Pa.

"Most people are reassured after three or four."
Barbara Colman, Hopewell Junction, N.Y.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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